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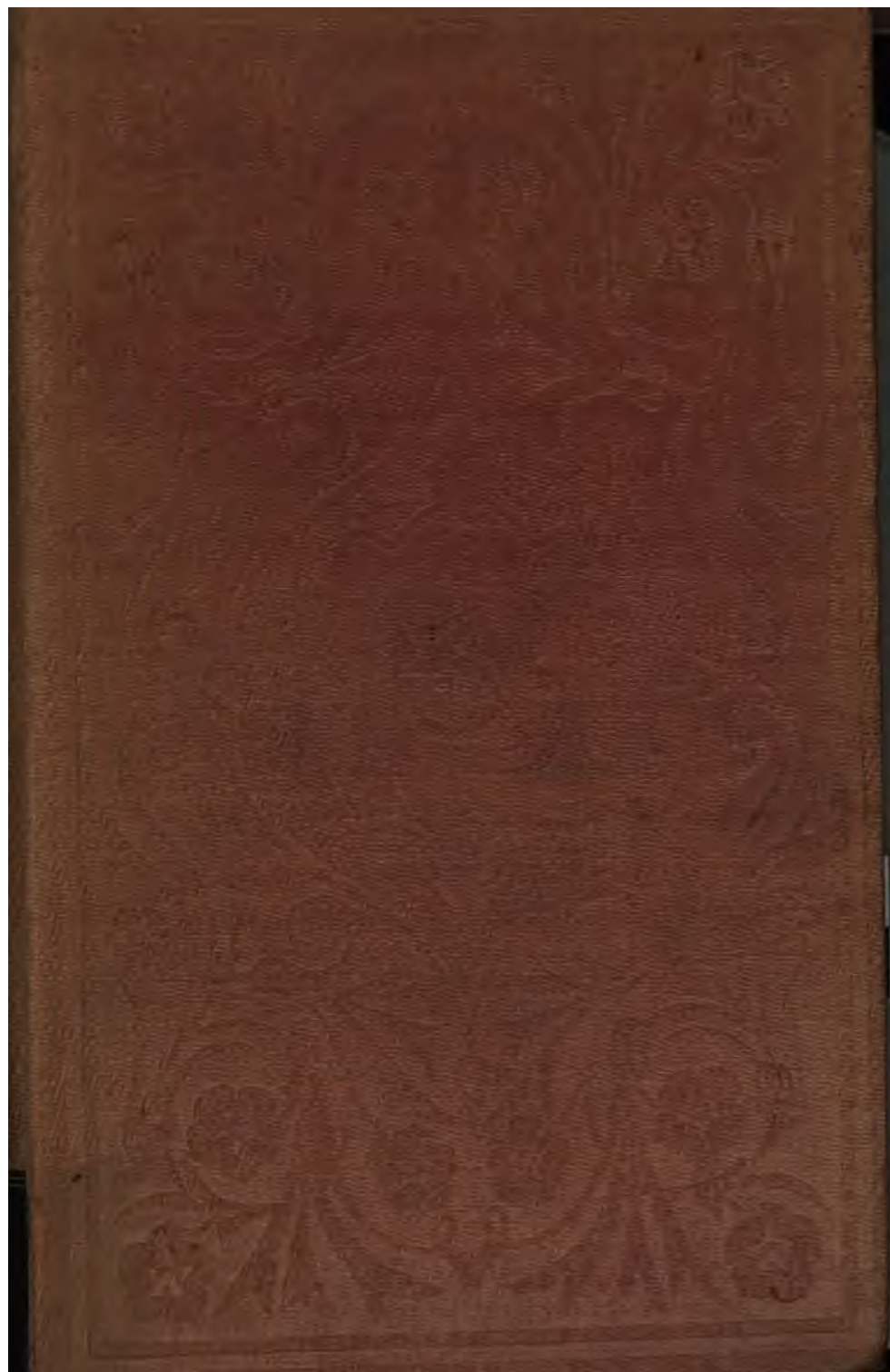
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THE
HOUSE OF ELMORE.

A FAMILY HISTORY.

“ When will the ancient curse be still'd, that weighs
Upon our house! Some mocking demon sports
With every new-formed hope, nor envious leaves
One hour of joy. So near the haven smiled—
So smooth the treacherous main—secure I deem'd
My happiness; the storm was lulled; and bright
In evening's lustre gleam'd the sunny shore :
Then through the placid air the tempest sweeps,
And bears me to the roaring surge again !”

SCHILLER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THE HOUSE OF ELMORE.

CHAPTER I.

MY SISTER.

THE Great City is in its height of season, and fashion holds pre-eminence; London is wreathed with garlands, and sown with sparkling diamonds. The opera is open, and carriages rank thick before its colonnade—lords and ladies, waiting for the last notes of the prima-donna, or lingering for the ballet, lounge in their draperied boxes and voluptuously-cushioned stalls.

London is in its season, and holding its rare holiday! Labour plods on as ever, early in

the morning, ere the sun has gilded London streets,—and creeping back at night, jaded, and worn out with toil; men of business—men bent upon making thousands in a day—jostle one another in their hurry for the gold, in the close, stifling streets, where the houses are narrow, and heaped together, and dark as cavern mouths—where the cool breeze never comes, and where the banks and merchants' firms are; prisons are full, as well as palaces, and Want, with shrivelled bony arms, still batters at the workhouse-gates!

I have been three days in London, and the change has already worked upon me a salutary effect. I am less depressed. My one cankering grief is so small, so lost in the stream of sorrows passing by me, and in which I have no share. Thoughts grave as my own, hearts as heavy, faces as full of listless apathy, I meet at every step. I am but one in a despairing myriad.

For the first time since my arrival in town, I am being ushered into a grandly-furnished apartment in the mansion of Sir John Boyington, Park Lane, and Sir John himself rises from his chair to greet me.

"What, Mr. Elmore!" he cries, shaking hands violently with me; "this is an unexpected pleasure. Caught me quite alone—an ocean bird."

The mysterious valet of the powerful build, who has been seated close to Sir John's side, rises at my entrance, and walks towards the door.

"Going, Twidger!"

"Yes, Sir John," he answers very respectfully; "if I am required, will it please you to ring."

He looks at me somewhat significantly, and takes his departure, not heeding Sir John's cries of—

"But you've not finished the story, Twidger. Did the Queen of Morocco catch him?"

We are together, and Sir John says to me, apologetically—

"Capital fellow that for stories—spin a yarn with any old salt in the king's pay, I'll wager my head. Take a seat, Mr. Elmore. How's your father?"

This is a question that sets every fibre in my body vibrating, as though I were struck

by sudden illness. I do not answer my eccentric interlocutor, but take the seat indicated by his nod.

"Will it be long before my aunt and sister return, Sir John," I ask, after a long interval of silence, during which my companion sits looking me intently in the face.

"They're at the Opera, but I understand from B——"

"B!"

"Lady B. Bouncing B. Comprehend?"

Sir John is decidedly more characteristic than ever, and his cogitations are of a more wandering tendency, for it is some minutes before I bring him round to the point from which he started.

"Opera—opera! Let me see. Yes—they've gone to the Opera—be back before the last act. Like music, Mr. Elmore?"

"Yes, Sir John, although ——"

He waits not for the conclusion of my reply to his question, but breaks in sharply with—

"Did you have any trouble to *see me*, now?"

"To see you, Sir John?"

"To get within hail?" he asks. "Did the servants *object* or demur?"

This is a delicate question, for had not I mentioned to the watchful porter my own name, and the object of my visit, I had not been seated before him now. But an inflammable appearance about his red, ferretty eyes, inclines me to conciliate him, and subdue his rising suspicions, and I answer evasively—

"I should hope I am too old a friend of Sir John Boyington's for an interdict to be put upon my admittance."

"Oh! yes, of course. You need not mention to B. I asked, Mr. Elmore."

"Rely upon me."

I wish heartily for my sister's return. Sir John is far from a pleasant companion. Looking at him more intently, I note a great change in his form and countenance since I bade him adieu at Wharnby, and a more perceptible sign in every word and gesture of his mental malady.

He is full of inquiries.

"Your father's dead, isn't he?" forgetting his former question."

"I regret to say so."

"Was he ever cut over the skull with a sabre, now?" he inquires, very earnestly.

"No, Sir John."

"He was a civilian—eh! He went mad once, didn't he? Ah! poor fellow—terrible thing the brain! I shall never go mad—I haven't got any."

He rambles in his speech, and ends with a low muttering to himself.

"I say, Elmore," he cries suddenly, "your sister is the girl—everybody's dying for her, and fretting for her, and getting cuts over their soft heads with sabres for her—she's the girl, Mr. Elmore!"

I am about to reply to the old man's spirited enconium, when the door opens, and cousin Jack makes his appearance.

"What, my dear Mr. Elmore," he cries, running towards me, "I am glad to see you. Upon my honour, I am very glad to see you, cousin Luke."

He is in evening dress, and his red curly hair, is in admirable contrast to his white neckcloth. His face is such a true speaking face, (masked though it is with innumerable freckles,) that there is no doubt of the real

heartiness of my reception. "I've been to that squalling, bawling place again, but I've given them good-bye a little unceremoniously. Oh! Luke, how I do hate screech, screech, screech, all the blessed night. But"—looking suddenly downcast, "you've come just as I'm off—that's *my* luck. I join my ship on Tuesday morning. Yesterday I was praying to be on board—now, I wouldn't mind another week ashore. Never mind. Holloa!" to Sir John, "why, old dad, have *you* been entertaining my cousin? why, you ought to be in bed—here, Twidger," ringing the bell, and causing the immediate appearance of that gentleman, "you won't mind attending on Sir John will you?"

"I shall be delighted to be of service to Sir John," he replies.

"Sir John is tired—there, there, good-night, God bless you—good-night."

The baronet confused by the entrance of Twidger, and the volubility of his son-in-law, rises with a vacant stare from his seat, shakes hands with both of us, and is led out by the valet of six feet one.

"Poor Sir John," sighs Jack Witherby, "he

gets worse and worse. I wish I could cure him, or take him to sea with me. My dear Luke, you are very pale—you have been ill?"

"I have just recovered from a fever."

"We never knew that!" he ejaculates.

"I believe my brother Edward wrote to Agnes."

"Did he—then, Agnes never told me, or by Jove! you would have seen me at 'The Best.' I'm such a capital nurse, cousin."

I inquire after his mother and sister.

"Oh! they're very well—jolly, I may say," he answers, "so's George. Poor George!"

"'Poor George!'" I echo.

He looks artfully at me, and says,—

"Ah! poor George."

He makes no attempt to enlighten me further, and we change the subject of discourse.

"Will Lady Boyington stay for the ballet to-night, cousin—for if such be her intention, I will look in to-morrow evening?"

"I don't think she will," he says, "but don't talk about going, man alive—going, indeed! Why, how long is it since you have seen—Agnes?"

He pauses before mentioning my sister's

name, and swallows an imaginary and indigestible substance, that impedes its proper utterance.

"Nine months—perhaps a week or two more. Sir John tells me she is a favourite."

"A favourite, I believe you, Luke. She's taken the world by storm—my mother always said she would. Of course you are aware of her engagement?"

"Engagement!" I repeat.

"Hardly an engagement, though," he says, colouring; "for nothing has been spoken about it, and George has not formally proposed, you must understand. Still, we all look upon it as settled; and George is very desirous to conclude all preliminaries, and mother has spoken to Agnes, I think, and they go out together a great deal, and——so on."

"Not an engagement, I should think," I reply, moodily, "or Agnes would have written and informed me. At least, most sisters would have done so."

"That is why I called my brother-in-law 'poor George,'" he says; "for he's frightfully nervous about her, and jealous as an old cat, and—Agnes, she makes him look right and

left, and keep lively, I can tell you—she's so merry, and has such a flow of spirits—so gay and artless."

"She is to be envied."

"Between ourselves, cousin, George is not good enough for—Agnes, and, in fact, who is? What a dear girl she is!—how you must have missed her at 'The Rest!'"

"Her spirits were somewhat variable at Wharnby."

"Were they, though?" he remarks, with a surprised air. "Here, she is as gay as a lark. Do you know, Luke, I used to fancy my cousin was engaged to that stiffish, handsome maypole-sort of a young chap, who used to be with you a great deal; but Lady Boyington asked—Agnes, and—Lord, how she laughed at the idea! It was a standard jest for two days."

"It was certainly a strange idea, cousin Witherby."

"There's the carriage," he cries, holding up a finger of attention.

The roll of wheels, the grating against kerb stones, the ringing clatter of the horses' heels, announce an arrival.

A few minutes afterwards, Mr. George Boyington strays into the room, with his crush hat still in his hand.

"What—wha't, Elmore! To be sure, my old friend, Elmore! How do!—how do?"

His white kids are in my hands, and the tears are almost in his eyes,—he is so glad to see me. "We were so attached, such bosom friends, from the first hour of our meeting. There was congeniality of sentiment between us, wasn't there, Elmore?" I smile and bow, and think of the horse-whipping this popinjay was nigh unto receiving, on the grand parade at Wharnby.

"You're looking dey-vilish queer, Elmore," he says, "but tha'at's almost natural, considering. I should be dey-vilish queer myself."

"Considering what, Mr. Boyington?"

He looks inquiringly at me, fearful of having given offence, and answers.

"Why, the Will of your respected pa-rent was a horrid affair altogether. Horrid!"

"I did not suffer in health from that, sir," I assert,—"I have been suffering from a severe fever, and am still pale from its effects."

"You will excuse me, Elmore, I know,"

he says, apologetically,—“but I spoke with the freedom of a friend and a relation. *Je demande votre pardon.*”

“Granted.”

After a careful re-arrangement of his stock, and a re-adjustment of his shirt collar, he takes off his white kids and flings them on the table.

“The ladies will be here directly. We have been to the Opera. A poor affair to-night. Wretched! A new tenor damned unmerci-fully. Could have sung better myself. As for his figure—fat, and crooked legs, sir. To personate the leader of the Templars,—a man short as a drummer-boy, and knock-kneed as a fla-mingo. Be-ast-ly!”

“You too, have your sufferings, Mr. Boyington.”

“Now, that’s an exceeding-ly un-kind sneer, Mr. Elmore,” he replies,—“why, you are quite sati-rical.”

“You mistake me.”

“Ja’ack,” to his half-brother, “will you make inquiry about the ladies? They are not aware of Mr. Elmore’s pre-sence, perhaps. Oblige me.”

Jack Witherby, ready to oblige anybody, leaves the room. A change immediately takes place in the manner of Mr. Boyington,—he advances to the door, tries the lock, and comes towards me on tiptoe, with a mysterious air.

“My dear Mr. Elmore.”

“Sir.”

“My very dear friend, Mr. Elmore,” he continues, forgetting his drawl, in the importance of his subject,—“as the brother of Agnes, you are entitled to my most particular consideration, and to receive from me, a full statement of my position as regards her.”

I bow my head.

“Now, Mr. Elmore, I—I most decidedly love Agnes. She has bewitched me—taken away all my heart, all my mind, all my strength—just like the Catechism.”

“You honour her.”

“Do you think so? Thank you”—he shakes hands violently. “Now, Mr. Elmore, I am rather nervous upon this point, and for the life of me—you’ll scarcely believe it—for the life of me I cannot speak to Agnes about it. I have tried it twice, and she’s like a butterfly, first this way, then that way, turn-

ing the topic in a most remarkable manner, that, if we keep on much longer in this style, it will stretch me out a corpse!"

He pats his forehead with his white handkerchief, rolls his ugly eyes about, and dashes into the subject once more.

"Mother—Lady B. that is," corrects he, "is interested in Agnes, and approves of the proposed match. *She* has spoken to Agnes, and ——"

"And her reply," I ask, as he pauses, with a blank look.

"Butterfly!" He still further illustrates his answer by twitching his fingers rapidly in the air. I repress a smile. "There's no obtaining a decided 'yes' or 'no.' Now, Mr. Elmore, will you use *your* influence, and let me know if a proposal would be—be—be understood?"

"Mr. Boyington," I say in reply, "each man ought to read the secret for himself—a look, a sign, an attentive ear to a single word will tell him that, and give him a valid reason to act upon, and a light to show the way. It is not my place to interfere."

"You are her brother," he remarks with a

downcast look, "and could do much for me. The look, the sign, the attentive ear are for me, but then ——"

He pauses again.

"But then?" I reiterate.

"But then they are for others likewise, Mr. Elmore, and that's—that's damned unpleasant!"

"Very."

"You will ask her, my dear friend—you *will* ask her? I am getting thin with worry; I have taken to padding; I am falling away visibly—visibly, sir. Observe my condition, Mr. Elmore."

He looks piteously at me, beseeching my intercession.

"It is strange that you, of all men, Mr. Boyington, should need my assistance in so delicate a matter," I say; "I had given you credit for great powers of self-command, for an iron nerve, and an unblushing front. Remember the parade at Wharnby—there was no lack of boldness then, man."

"Mr. Elmore, before I fell a victim to the tender passion, I could have done anything—now, sir, I am on the rack."

"I will ask Agnes," I say, anxious to conclude the dialogue between us.

"God bless you. Mr. Elmore; I am indebted—dee—epley indebted."

The drawl comes back to him, and Boyington is himself again.

In a few minutes the door re-opens, and Agnes and my aunt, followed by young Witherby and his sister, make their appearance. Agnes flies towards me, and puts her hands upon my shoulders, and proffers me her lips to kiss.

"Dear Luke, this is a welcome meeting."

In sober truth, she is wondrously beautiful. As she stands before me in her evening dress, and with her mother's diamonds—the old legacy—blazing upon her neck and in her hair, and the rich satin dress of violet hue, displaying her queenly form, her faultless carriage, I confess unto myself that I have never seen beauty so striking and so dazzling.

It is with a pang I notice all signs of the dead father vanished from her dress — all look of sorrow absent from her sparkling eyes—no memory of what changes Wharnby has seen, and my wrecked hopes experienced, since she left 'The Rest' that fatal morning.

"Well, Agnes."

I fold her to my breast a moment, and feel a brother's love, despite her faults, her stubborn will, or the evil she has caused.

"My dear nephew, I am rejoiced to welcome you—my dear nephew, I am delighted beyond all expression," cries Lady Boyington, her tall and large-proportioned form looming before me in green silk, and her ladyship's fat white shoulders a conspicuous attraction. I salute her and my cousin Jane, who blushes and looks pleased to see me, and then we group together and enter into general conversation.

Lady Boyington asks after Edward and Mr. Vaudon—"lucky man," and becomes sentimental after a short time, and with a curved mouth murmurs some expressions of condolence and talks of my "poor father," and my "dear father," and my "respected father."

Mr. George Boyington is strategic, and contrives to separate the family from Agnes and me, and to leave us for a quarter of an hour or so, together.

Lady Boyington, and children are equally willing that brother and sister should exchange

enquiries and talk of home and Wharnby, and so I sit by Agnes's side on the couch, and she commences.—

“How ill you are looking, Luke?”

“I have had another attack of my old fever, Agnes.”

“I was sorry to hear it from Edward.”

“How do you like this ‘life in London,’ Aggy?”

“I would not exchange five years of the life I am leading now, for immortality in Wharnby.”

“So happy then?”

She reflects.

“Yes, I am happy, Luke. There are some temperaments made for the busy world, as there are others for the quiet country hamlets and green shady nooks that hermits love. Mine is of the former.”

“I regret it.”

“Still regret it, brother,” she replies; “why should you regret that I love society and am fitted to adorn it?—it is a vain question, but I do *adorn* it, or am lavishly flattered and made much of in derision. Oh! Luke, I thought at the Cliverton Ball I could

never feel more happy, or glow with greater delight or feel prouder in my own estimation, but," her eyes sparkle and the diamonds on her neck heave wildly; "I have seen true life, I have been in *real* society—I have found that paltry ball a mere dance in a barn."

"You compliment the directors of that fête."

"Oh! I have so much to tell you of the pleasures I have participated in."

"And much to thank my worthy aunt for the initiation thereunto."

"Thank aunt!" repeats Agnes; "my dear Luke, I have been the making of my aunt."

"I do not comprehend."

"When I came to town with my aunt, the Boyingtons were not very high in the aristocratic scale," says Agnes, lowering her voice; "they were just tolerated—but, as for invitations, nobility balls, titled friends, they were almost entirely excluded from. Well, I 'came out' and what is the result?"

"I am at a loss to guess."

"That day after day the carriages before

this house eclipse all Park Lane, in number or in their owners' rank. That our invitations are too numerous to accept, and that my portrait appears in 'Books of Beauty,' and shines from fashionable print-shops — that I have attended the principal balls given by the nobility this season, and that I have been presented at Court."

"Is it possible!"

"You may well look astonished, Luke, but it is no romance. What a leap from 'The Rest' to the glittering Palace of a King!"

"It is no wonder that poor Redwin is forgotten, or that the daughter sets aside the mourning indicative of a father's loss in such gay scenes of life, gilded with Royal smiles, and coloured by her own ambitions."

She looks down at her dress, and then full at me.

"It is not fashionable, long mourning. My loss is felt as deeply as your own, despite the contrast we present."

"You think so, Agnes," I reply; "but you cannot gauge the depths of my affliction, though I can measure every drop of yours."

"No, Luke."

"Yes, Agnes. The cup did not overflow, and there were jewelled hands to keep it steadily in its place, or to take it from your sight, and mask the story that it told with flowers."

"More metaphorical than ever, Luke; you should have been a poet."

"Well, we will not quarrel, Aggy, at our first meeting after nine months' separation. The outward mourning matters little. If it were a true test of the depth of man's emotion, the sterling value of his sorrow, how many crape garments would fade to nothingness even on the grave's brink!"

"Gloomier than ever, Luke, as well as metaphorical. How is Celia?"

"Celia is well."

"Have you quarrelled?" she asks, quickly.

"We have parted. My change of worldly position did not warrant Miss Silvernot in the continuance of her engagement. It is broken off, and I wish to hear no more concerning it."

"No wonder you are metaphorical and gloomy, brother," she says, lightly; "a disappointed cavalier is a rueful knight, indeed! So, you have come to London to get heart-

whole? It is easily accomplished. You must join in our festivities."

"I thank you—but ——"

"No excuses! Why, there is Mrs. Morton, whom I see very often, to the good, yet! She often speaks of you; and do you know, Luke, I sometimes fancy, that at Wharnby it would have needed but little persuasion to have made her Mrs. Elmore?"

"You flatter me, Agnes, and value your friend's heart too cheaply."

"What a chance it would be!" she says, musingly, "now affairs have altered with you. A marriage would reinstate you—and more than reinstate you; and Mrs. Morton is immensely rich."

"I do not covet riches."

"Neither did the fox covet the grapes, you know—but then they would not drop into his mouth, Luke. Besides, there are too many already in the lists, and the pretty widow is probably engaged."

"Are you engaged, Aggy?" I enquire, the presence of Mr. Boyington, being brought to my remembrance by a violent sneeze, from that gentleman.

"Engaged, Luke!" she cries, "oh! no more of your engagements."

"But you have not set your heart upon a single life?"

"I am very ambitious, Luke."

"I suppose I shall see you a titled lady then,—my aunt's cognomen is rather grand—'Lady Boyington!'"

She glances at me, with her searching brilliant eyes.

"Ah, ho! my cunning brother, are you enlisted in the service of Mr. George, too?"

"I do not desire the match—he is not fitted to occupy Paul Redwin's place, or to supersede him. Let my friend be at least cut out by one that will do credit to Miss Elmore's judgment."

"You do not like George?"

"Candidly, I do not. Things that have passed, give me no high opinion of his talents, or his virtues. I promised him to ——"

"There, there, Luke," she cries, "I'll hear no more. Suffice it to say, I can guess all, and my cousin can bear suspense if I like him, and I cannot remain here with great propriety, if I reject him. Let the matter rest."

There will come moments of opportunity when *I* wish it."

"Strange girl—to me, as unto all, a riddle."

"Strange in declining a quarrel, or a long engagement, Luke?"

"Perhaps it is best, Aggy, for you are not always of one mind. At all events, I doubt if you love your aunt's step-son, and there is no happy marriage without it, even to a woman who aims alone at station, and a title. But, Agnes Elmore may be surveying from an eminence, and be biding the arrival of some gallant with higher honours—perhaps some Giant from the clouds of Court, with gartered knee and star upon the breast."

Her hand grasps my arm with a suddenness that startles me, the red blood covers face and neck, and bosom, and she glares wildly at me.

"What do you mean?—What do you mean?"

My look of astonishment re-assures her, for she breaks into a merry-ringing laugh, and turns to her aunt and cousins.

"Here is Luke drawing such a fancy sketch, Aunt—picturing my future husband with the

Order of the Garter, and decorated on the breast with stars. Is he not the kindest of brothers?"

"I am sure he is," says cousin Jane, very earnestly. Agnes rises from the couch, and crosses to her aunt. I follow, and our dialogue is ended. Agnes is calm and queenly, but to my observation, there appears still a throbbing at the breast, which I cannot account for.

The night is late, and I shortly take my leave, resisting my aunt's urgent entreaties, to make her house my home, and promising to dine with the family on the morrow. George Boyington follows me down the broad staircase.

"My dear friend, you have told her?"

"Yes, Boyington."

"And she—she—God bless me, I feel like a jelly! What did she say?"

"I cannot get any decided answer; but it appears to me that you have a fair chance; you are living in the same house, and should watch your opportunity."

"A fair chance!" he cries; "thank you—thank you."

He looks triumphant, and fondles his large

sandy whisker with his left hand as we stand talking in the hall.

“ Still remember the —— ’

“ Remember the *what*, Elmore?”

“ Butterfly,” I answer, laconically.

He gives a feeble groan, and sinks into a half despair again, and bids me ‘ Good-night,’ with a heavy sigh.

Leaving Park Lane behind me, I set forth in the direction of my hotel, thinking of sister Agnes.

CHAPTER II.

MEETINGS.

It was not with any pleasurable or congratulatory feeling that I found the popularity (if I may use the term) of Agnes Elmore to be something more than a mere name. Looking over 'Court Circulars' and fashionable newspapers, I found my sister's progress noted day by day—my sister ever on the list at ball and entertainment, and grand *réunion*. Not alone in such chronicles as these met I the name of Miss Elmore, but novels and poems were dedicated to her by unknown admirers; and, as she had told me on the night when we sat side by side on the couch, in Sir John Boyington's drawing-room, there was her portrait in the west-end printshops, and the last edition

of 'Keepsakes' and 'Annuals' had striven to immortalize her.

I felt no pride in this constant repetition of her name and face—I knew how much it brought to the recollection of that bright world, in which Agnes lived, the mother who dishonoured us. There were many around Agnes who had known Agnes's mother, and comments were not unspared, nor contrasts refrained from being drawn.

True, that Agnes had attained to a more lofty eminence, and commanded homage from men of higher rank, it was not to be denied; but it was a fearful height to which she had arisen; and from the plain I gazed upwards at her brilliant form, and grew dizzy in the gazing. It was like magic, like destiny and fate, that this should have come about. It appeared so unlike reality, that the girl I saw last at Wharnby, should be the reigning *belle* of the great London season. Well might she despise home, after that—it was her nature to cast aside all recollections that told of her first estate.

How beautiful she was! In the gay life in which I thought to drown my one care,

her equal never met me. She knew her power, and it was a terrible knowledge for one so ambitious—one who had ever self in view, and self alone to study.

Mr. George Boyington was not the only worshipper of my sister's fatal loveliness. Agnes had a command over many hearts—some young and true, some old and shrunken before their time, like that of the heir to the Boyington estate itself.

George Boyington had striven hard to maintain his old man-of-the-world demeanour in the new sensations of love and expectancy : he had not sunk into the maudlin lover and the nervous admirer without a desperate struggle with himself for the mastery ; but he had finally succumbed, and had become the greater slave for being at one time a man without a conscience—an aristocratic hawk hungering for prey. He kept up his character, too, before his old associates, and strutted arm-in-arm with them in Regent Street and Pall Mall, or in the Parks, with that bold, brazen look on his face, that I had first seen on the cliffs near 'The Rest.' But when he came home, he set aside his old style, and

went sneaking and cringing into the room and towards Agnes, and was as sheepishly attentive as if he had been an amorous youth of seventeen summers.

About a week after I had made my first call at No. —, Park Lane, little Jack Witherby, in a strange bewilderment of pleasure at his second cruise, and sorrow at leaving his mother, Sir John, and all of us, took his departure in His Majesty's ship 'The Thunderbolt.'

The night before he left, was spent quietly by the Boyingtons, and Jack Witherby had nearly all the talk to himself. He rattled on in fine style, and was in the highest spirits, till he walked home with me, late in the evening.

"It's the last time, for a precious while, Luke, that I shall be walking with you," he said, half whimpering, as we strolled down Piccadilly, in the clear moonlight—"and it may be the very last. I may find my quietus in a cannon-ball, or a sunken rock, or a sudden lurch overboard, or in a hundred ways that sailors manage to get off the hooks at sea. There'll be plenty of changes by the time I do return, if I am spared, won't there, cousin?"

"Every hour brings some change to man, Jack ; and we shall not stand exempt. How long will you be away ?"

"Three years—perhaps four or five."

"Why, you'll return a strapping fellow, Witherby ! A bold, handsome, young lieutenant—who knows ?"

He laughed at this, and slapped his hand upon his knee, in his delight.

"I hope to see you come back covered with blushing honours, Jack ; and, perhaps, marry my sister, and cut out 'poor George.'"

I said it as a jest, but he looked grave, and walked on by my side without answering.

"What say you ?" I inquired.

"Say !—say what, cousin ?" he asked—
"oh !—about—Agnes. Why, Luke, you are getting in better spirits, or you wouldn't crack your jokes at me. Agnes," he said, reflectively, "is born for rank and a high station, and she will adorn them both. We've had many a bit of fun together—I hope she won't forget me directly, Luke—do you think she will ?"


Forget you, Witherby ? No."

Don't let her, there's a good chap," he said

earnestly, as he pulled his gold-banded cap over his face; "now and then bring my name up and say—'Jack used to do that,' and 'do you remember, Agnes, how Jack did so and so, and said this and that,' because I am very fond of my pretty cousin—fond as *you* are."

He kept talking with the simplicity of a child about her, and I thought within myself that it was better Jack was going to sea. When he bade me 'good bye' before the steps of my hotel, he rammed his cap closer than ever over his eyes, shook me violently by both hands, made a gurgling noise in the throat, and then took to his heels and tore across the road, and, under plunging horses' heads, to the opposite pavement, from whence he waved his hand in last farewell, and ran towards Park Lane, as if it were for his life.

I have spoken of the gay existence I led in London—an existence almost forced upon me by my relatives and sister, and in which I sought to keep down the cruel memory of what I had fled from Wharnby for. I have to enter somewhat more fully into the details of this glowing life of fashion, and to recal scenes which form part of the task I have set



myself, and to chronicle those incidents which are, with me, so indelibly fixed.

Amongst the powerful rivals of Mr. Boyington, I fancied I detected a Lord Chilvers, a nobleman who had lost everything but his name at the gaming-table, and would have risked that, had it been marketable, upon one throw of the dice.

He was a young man of five or six and twenty, with a handsome set of features, wasted by dissolute living, and marked by late hours and excitement. How he contrived to support his vast establishment was as much a mystery to his friends as to the world—debts were hanging round and hemming him in on all sides, yet he kept his head upreared, and defied the creditors whose name was Legion. His was a name always on people's lips—the press made much of it, and had ever a new story to tell concerning it. Satirical newspapers caricatured it, and held it up for a nation's scorn. I became acquainted with his lordship one morning, as I rode with Agnes, Mr. Boyington, and my cousin Jane along Rotten-row. The Row was thronged with equestrians, and Agnes, her cousin, and her

admirer, were exchanging salutations every instant. Lord Chilvers, on a superb grey mare, met us, wheeled round, and rather uncereemoniously joined our cortège. Agnes very gracefully made me known to his lordship, who raised his hat in acknowledgment, and said—

“I am delighted to make the acquaintance of Mr. Elmore. Well, Boyington, and how are you? Miss Boyington and Miss Elmore, you are both as charming as ever!”

Agnes smiled bewitchingly, and Mr. Boyington grunted like a pig. There was an agreeable dashing way, with Lord Chilvers, that interested me; he put on no patrician airs with his more plebeian companions, and he was *bon camarade* with me on the instant.

What a deal of attention a young man gets paid by his own sex when he has a handsome sister!

We proceeded in our canter. Lord Chilvers rode between Agnes and me, and Mr. Boyington between his sister and Agnes. What his lordship said to Agnes was expressed in so low a tone, that I could not catch the full meaning, but he was, doubtless, a lively and witty companion, for Agnes's

silvery laugh rang out now and then, and her eyes sparkled at him as he looked into them. Mr. Boyington whipped his horse, and set him plunging against his sister's, scowled once or twice when the dialogue was animated, and kept glancing from Agnes in her riding-dress to the young nobleman in his height of fashion, and broke in with abrupt inquiries, and 'spoiled sport,' as Lord Chilvers thought, in all probability.

"Miss Elmore, you have not forgotten Thursday next?"

"Forgotten it, my lord!" she replied. "It is a red-letter day in my calendar of engagements!"

"Now, that's complimentary," he said, laughing; "and I thank you for it, heartily. It's my last party this season — I'm off to Paris."

How many times had I heard the word 'Paris' in my life?

"That is early in the season, Lord Chilvers," remarked Agnes.

"Rather early, but I cannot flatter myself I shall be missed," said Chilvers, entirely forgetting the tenacious memory of creditors for the moment.

"Oh! we shall miss you."

"Really, now!" cried he, insinuatingly, "my dear Miss Elmore, you make me a happy man! You will positively miss me!"

As he bent forward in his saddle, with his most killing look, Agnes, ever wayward, filiped her horse with her riding-cane, and started forward, leaving the full effect of his glance to be bestowed on Mr. George Boyington.

Mr. Boyington grinned; and Lord Chilvers, recovering himself, darted forward also.

Presently, Lord Chilvers and I were side by side.

"Mr. Elmore, might I take the liberty of expressing a wish to see you at Alton House, on Thursday next? I was not aware of your presence in London, or should have more specially invited you."

"I am obliged, my lord," I answered; "but ——"

"No excuses—I pray you, no excuses," he said, hastily; "you must accompany your sister and my good friends, the Boyingtons. Come, Elmore, you consent?"

I had no particular desire to go or stay—I

had no curiosity to satisfy, and no ambition to mingle with those above my rank; but I had no wish to shun society—for I had not come to London to lead a hermit's life,—so I inclined my head in acquiescence.

“Going!” exclaimed Lord Chilvers, as Agnes gaily bade him farewell.

“Yes; I have some calls to make with Lady Boyington,” replied my sister. “For the present, adieu.”

“But you’ve no calls to make, Mr. Elmore,” he said, addressing me. “Suppose you and I have another turn—we have but a little while to get up a friendship in. What say you?”

It would have been a churlish act to refuse, so I joined Lord Chilvers, whilst the Boyingtons and Agnes cantered towards Park Lane.

“You have a matchless sister, Mr. Elmore,” he said.

“You compliment me.”

“Truly, you have,” he asserted; “such a sister as any man ought to be proud of. Do you know, Mr. Elmore, she has made a greater sensation in our circles than any beauty that has shone upon the west-end world for years! We are to have the ‘Agnes Waltz,’ and the

‘Agnes Quadrille,’ for the last testimonials as to her myriad of admirers. She is —— ah! Sir George—ah! my dear Mrs. Morton!”

A curvetting of horses, a little prancing and plunging, and we were facing Mrs. Morton and an aristocratical gentleman of about thirty years of age. Seated on horseback with her black ringlets falling from beneath her hat, and her cheek flushed by exercise, she was more beautiful than ever.

Lord Chilvers had not concluded his ceremony of greeting, ere Mrs. Morton raising her dark eyes beheld me by the nobleman’s side. A slight embarrassment, a more heightened colour, then she extended her fairy hand exclaiming :—

“Mr. Elmore, this is indeed a surprise.”

“You are acquainted with my friend?” said Chilvers, with a wondering stare.

“I have known Mr. Elmore some years, my lord,” replied Mrs. Morton.

“Sir George Harvey,” said Lord Chilvers ;
“my friend, Mr. Elmore.”

The gentleman made a stiff obeisance towards me, and then sat bold upright in his saddle, neither well pleased with my appear-

ance, nor with my uncereemonious introduction to him.

"Have you been long in London?" asked Mrs. Morton of me, as Sir George and Lord Chilvers entered into an iced colloquy concerning the weather, and the parliament, and the last budget.

"But a few weeks, madam."

"Weeks! — and yet there was once a promise made at Cliverton, that my poor mansion should not be neglected, if chance should ever bring you to our busy Babel," she said, half-reproachfully, as she shook her curls and laughed.

"I have not forgotten that promise, I assure you."

"So you are a friend of Lord Chilvers, Mr. Elmore?"

"I was introduced to him this morning—so he is a friend of an early date, my dear madam."

"I am glad of that," she said, then in a lower tone, added: "if you will take my advice, be cautious of him — Lord Chilvers makes his friends serviceable, if possible."

Before I could reply, Sir George, said, coldly:—

"Had we not better proceed, Mrs. Morton?"

"I am ready, Sir George."

"There is a letter unanswered, Mrs. Morton," said Chilvers; "respecting a ball at Alton House. 'It is positively my last appearance.'"

"I do not know if I shall witness it," replied the lady, as we all commenced curvetting and prancing again; "I do not know if we are friends."

"Oh! friends upon my honour."

"Well, I will decide to-morrow. Mr. Elmore, I hope shortly to have the pleasure of seeing you again."

They were gone, and Chilvers looked over his shoulder after them.

"A stiffish buck, Sir George—eh, Elmore?"

"He appears reserved," I replied, as we resumed our ride.

"Reserved, by the holy Moses!" cried his lordship; "there isn't a prouder peacock in the row this moment. I wish with all my heart, pretty Mrs. Morton would send him to the right about."

"Are they engaged, my lord?" I asked with some interest.

"Heaven knows!" replied Chilvers; "Mrs.

Morton has been reported 'engaged' so many times, that I shall never believe she has forgotten her first vows, until I see her at St. George's with my own eyes."

"She has been a widow some years."

"Yes—it's rather strange."

"She sets a value on a single life."

"A wise little woman," assented his lordship; "quite an example to the softer sex in general. She did not live happily with her first husband, you see, and she fears to risk a second. With her wealth, I do not blame her—although, with her personal attractions to boot, I may envy Harvey's place in her good graces. My dear Elmore, I assure you I was in love with her, once upon a time—but then," lightly added he, "I have been in love with every woman in England."

"You estimate a single life at its true value, also, my lord."

"Um," he said, musingly—"perhaps so."

A party of young men having met him, I took the opportunity of bidding him "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, if it must be so," he said, a trifle reluctantly; "are you engaged to-night?"

“To-night, I fear I am, my lord.”

“Oh ! its no matter,” he said, carelessly ;
“ we meet on Thursday.”

He raised his hat, and, after imitating his example, I rode away, but not before I had heard the following :—

“ Who is that, Chilvers ?”

“ A particular friend of mine—a brother of Miss Elmore’s.”

CHAPTER III.

ALTON HOUSE.

ON the appointed Thursday, I arrived at a late hour at Alton House. I had declined to accompany my sister and the Boyingtons, who were, for a wonder, going early to the ball. I had wavered till the last minute, and then had finally resolved to join in the aristocratic festivities to which I was invited. There were no feelings of bashful youth—no shame-faced reserve—as I stepped into the great marble-paved hall, thronged with servants in rich liveries, and ushers with wands, and filled with rare exotics of intoxicating perfume. I thought of the Great Cliverton Ball, and of my inexperience, and of my reason for going thither, and the con-

trast that this night afforded. At any other time, the scene might have bewildered me—had I thought more of it, or had wished to partipate in its enjoyments, I might have shrunk back alarmed; but, cool and self-possessed, I followed the usher up the carpeted stairs, and my name passed from lip to lip in pompous announcement; and the reporters of the fashionable papers—still lingering for news—affixed it in their note-book, and chronicled my arrival.

At the ball-room door, and for the first time, a slight nervous feeling passed across me.

“Mr. Elmore.”

The doors swung wide, and into the glaring light and glowing life, I entered with my pale face and grave step.

“My dear Elmore, how late you are.”

Lord Chilvers was shaking me by the hand.

“I have been bothering your sister for the last hour about you,” he continued; “and I was beginning to cogitate how I should sue you for a ‘Breach of Promise,’ and what demand I could make upon you by way of damages.”

He linked his arm in mine, and we walked down the room together. The scene was dazzling and magnificent, and my sluggish blood moved quicker in my veins; some portion of the excitement of the scene communicated its contagion to me. There was not a very great number of guests—but in all there was the sterling print of the high-born and the wealthy, and I felt it was not my sphere, and that I was beneath it. A celebrated quadrille band, led by a great master, occupied one end of the room, in a gilded orchestra of skilful workmanship. I gave one glance at the walls, with their rich hangings and appointments, at the painted ceiling, and the myriads of lights, and then turned my attention to my host.

“I do not perceive my sister, Lord Chilvers.”

“She is promenading—I saw her a few moments since—ah! there she is.”

I looked towards the direction indicated. Agnes was in white satin, and the snowy lustre of the dress subdued beneath the rich white lace, and scattered thick with pearls, set off her bright complexion and commanding height to their fullest advantage.

The mother's legacy was absent this particular evening, and there were other pearls glowing from her hair and clasping her white arms at the wrist. She was reclining on the arm of a tall, stoutly-built gentleman, of about forty, who looked into her face very often, and evidently spoke in a suppressed tone of voice. Agnes's hands were linked on his arm, and she was listening earnestly to every word he uttered, although more than once her eyes suddenly shifted aside to look another way.

As they advanced I made a movement, as if to speak to her, when Lord Chilvers swerved round, and drew me quickly in another direction.

"Wait a moment, Elmore; your sister is engaged."

"I merely wished to address a good evening to her and to inquire after Lady Boyington and daughter."

"Lady Boyington and daughter are here to reply to that inquiry themselves, and it is a rule never to spoil a flirtation, *mon ami*."

"Oh! I would not have disturbed them, my lord."

"There is Lady B. fanning herself on the couch by the window, and the fair Jane by her side," said Chilvers; "haste, and secure a partner in one of them. Our next dance will be a waltz, and Lady Boyington waltzes like a sylph."

He withdrew his arm, and giving me a comical, half saucy look, left me to my relations.

The music had not struck up the waltz, although many of the guests were waiting. Some of the music had been mislaid, and there was a little confusion in the orchestra. I made my respects to my aunt and cousin, and solicited Jane's hand for the next dance. It is needless to say, Lord Chilvers was wrong in his assertion concerning my aunt's waltzing qualifications. Lady Boyington not having danced, much less waltzed, the last twenty or thirty years.

Jane was engaged to her half-brother, who now came towards us, biting the thumb of his white kid glove.

"How do, Elmore," he said to me, "how pre-e-cious late you have made your appear-

ance. 'Fashionable in the extreme! Now, Jane."

Two ladies escorted by a gentleman, passed, and one was Mrs. Morton. She was more beautiful than ever, to-night, and her clear, yet almost Spanish olive complexion, was set off by her rich dress of amber satin, and black lace. There was a dreamy, indifferent manner exhibited towards her companions, that struck me even as she passed.

Almost involuntarily I uttered her name.

She looked round quickly, and her face lightened up with a sunny smile.

"Ah! Mr. Elmore," she cried, stopping and extending her hand,—“I expected to—— that is, I hardly expected to see you here to-night."

"I am engaged to Percy, this dance," whispered her lady companion, to Mrs. Morton.

Percy, their escort, a young man of vacant expression, carried off the lady, leaving Mrs. Morton with me. I introduced my fair companion to my aunt. George and my cousin Jane, were already in the crowd.

"What has delayed the waltz so long, I

wonder?" remarked Lady Boyington, "have they lost any of the music?"

"They managed better at Cliverton," said Mrs. Morton, with a bright glance at me.

"Oh! Cliverton; do you remember our first waltz, Mrs. Morton?"

"Remember it—ah! well."

"We cannot do better than celebrate our second meeting at a ball, by engaging in this dance, if your consent be not already granted, and you will favour me?"

"It would be a well-merited punishment if I were engaged," said Mrs. Morton, gaily, "for then I should deprive you of a dance, and you hardly deserve one, coming at so late an hour. Why, some of the company have gone!"

"I did not know my fair friend was one of the guests, or should have made greater haste to Alton House," said I, gallantly, as I offered her my arm.

"Empty words!" replied she, smiling, as we moved towards the centre of the room.

The crash of the music, sounded at last, and I passed my arm round her slender waist, and she rested her hand in mine. I looked

down at her—she was blushing, and I fancied slightly trembling.

For a moment we whirled round, and then I stopped as if I had been shot!

“What is the matter, Mr. Elmore,” cried Mrs. Morton, anxiously, “are you unwell?”

“No, no—pray excuse me—let us proceed. The waltz struck me—it is an old one, and I have heard it under strange circumstances—I ask your pardon.”

We resumed the dance. It was the old ‘Honeymoon Waltz!’ that waltz played so many years ago, at the time when my mother glided down the back stone-stairs of the house, looking on the Park, and fled away from home. The waltz which my father interrupted, with his fearful look of madness, as he stood in the doorway, crushed by the first blow of his dishonour—the waltz which he tore from the leaves of the music book, one evening in the twilight, when we were living at ‘The Rest.’

I thought of all this as I held the light form of the beautiful woman pressed to me—her waist encircled by my arm. I glanced towards Agnes; she was not dancing, but seated by the side of the tall man with whom I had

seen her at my entrance. Their conversation was animated ; and, unaware of my watching eyes, my sister's admirer for a moment caught her hand and held it in his own. It was but for a moment—and then Agnes, without a gesture of indignation, or a look of surprise, withdrew it slowly from his clasp. The face of the man was flushed and red—and, in our evolutions, I could not forbear keeping him and Agnes in sight at every opportunity. Once he leant forward and looked towards the door, and my quick vision discerned a diamond star glittering on his breast !

The star upon the breast, and Agnes's cry that night !

“ Who is the gentleman with my sister, Mrs. Morton ? ” I asked, quickly.

“ You do not know ? ” she answered, pantingly.

We were rapidly waltzing at the time.

“ I have not seen him before.

“ It is His Royal Highness the Duke of——.”

“ The Duke of —— ! ” I exclaimed—
“ and here ! ”

“ He has been here once before—and only

once," she said — "perhaps Agnes is destined to be a duchess, Mr. Elmore, for he follows her like a constant swain."

I said no more, and we were silent till the waltz was ended, and I led her to a cushioned recess by the window, and took my seat beside her.

"I am not used to fashionable life, my dear Mrs. Morton, so I would ask you one question," said I.

"Concerning Agnes?"

"Yes."

"Let me hear it."

"Is it etiquette for a Royal Duke to pay such marked attention to one lady in the company? — attention, which, in my opinion, seems likely to give rise to much injurious comment?"

"Ah! you are so punctilious, Mr. Elmore," said she, in reply, "and are so full of scruples."

"You have not answered my question, Mrs. Morton."

"Is it etiquette? — Well, no," she replied; "but then, a duke is almost above set rules — and more especially the Duke of ———."

Agnes, Mr. Elmore, is the reigning beauty—and His Royal Highness pays due homage, like a true cavalier. As for comments," she said, quietly, "dukes are above them."

"But not Agnes Elmore," I answered; "and, candidly, I dislike it."

"You must not imagine he has been entirely devoted to Miss Elmore since his arrival. She had but just accepted his escort as you entered the ball-room."

I felt relieved at this statement, although there was a weight upon my mind that was very heavy still.

His Royal Highness rose—and, having exchanged a few words with some of the principal guests, took his departure—leaving the field clear for Mr. Boyington, who plunged wildly across, and superseded an extensive dandy, who was mincingly advancing. But Agnes had had enough of *tête-à-têtes*, and so brought Mr. George back again, and joined us on the couch.

"So, Luke, you have arrived," she said. "If you had come half-an-hour earlier, I would have introduced you to the Duke of _____."

"I have no ambition for so honoured an introduction," I replied.

"Well, Mrs. Morton, you have danced at last, I see."

"Danced!" with a heightened colour;
"could I refuse a waltz with so old a friend?"

"Have you not danced before this evening?" I asked.

Agnes forestalled Mrs. Morton in her reply.

"Oh! she has been in the worst of tempers, Luke; I am sure she has found fault with every person in the room, and has been quite satirical and severe. She has refused Lord Chilvers and Sir ——"

"Mr. Elmore does not require a list," interrupted Mrs. Morton, with a merry laugh.

"Mr. Elmore is more than contented with the preference shown him," I remarked.

There was a fascinating look about the eyes for a reply, that reminded me of old times, and thrilled me.

"I—I have not had the pleasure of being introduced to Mrs. Morton," drawled Boyington.

"And I am sure I cannot spare the time,

Mr. Boyington," cried Agnes, saucily ; " here comes Lord Chilvers to solicit my hand for the cotillon. He has just returned from accompanying his Royal Highness to the carriage."

This was quite enough for Mr. Boyington, who, forgetting Mrs. Morton and all introductions, led Agnes off to her place in the dance.

" You see Agnes has not much respect for etiquette," said Mrs. Morton, smiling ; " she is a merry girl, and a dear one."

" You like her ?"

" Very much."

The cotillon commenced, and I sat in the recess of the window with Mrs. Morton. She seemed contented with being my companion, and I felt old sorrows but lightly in her presence. How ridiculous it appeared to me on that night, when she and Celia met at Mr. Dartford's house, I should have thought her my evil angel ! Was not the daughter of the Silvernots my evil angel ?—for had she not thrust aside the affection fostered with her false love ? And Mrs. Morton ! Why, she was beautiful and young, and weaved a stronger spell around me each instant that I sat by her side and listened to her voice, and

the music rang softly in our ears, and the giddy maze of dancers flitted by.

She spoke of Celia, and asked me if she were well, with a meaning smile.

"I have not seen Miss Silvernot for many weeks," I answered.

"But you may have heard?"

"Nor heard."

"That is strange!"

"Why strange, dear madam?"

"Nothing."

She sat gazing at the dancers several minutes, and toyed with the bracelet of rubies on her arm. Presently, in a lower voice, she asked, still looking at the dancers, and twisting the bracelet round and round her wrist—"Are you an unfaithful correspondent, then?"

"I do not correspond with Miss Silvernot."

"But you are engaged, Mr. Elmore," with a surprised air, but still with look averted; "I heard that at Cliverton."

"Mrs. Morton cannot be unaware of a change in my position with the world. It is too well known, and the news too generally diffused."

"I have heard something to the effect," she

murmured ; " but, still, I do not find in that remark an answer to my question."

" There is an answer contained therein, nevertheless."

She looked up, at last, with her large lustrous black eyes, and said, as if she were taking a long breath :—

" Indeed."

" I am talking as to an old friend —— "

" Am I not one ?" she asked, quickly.

" Yes, dear madam ; but, perhaps, hardly a fitting confidante for a young man like myself," I replied. " But I would not wish any friend of mine to suppose Miss Silvernot is engaged to me."

We sat together long after the cotillon had come to an end, and talked of the evenings spent at Mr. Dartford's. She had not changed—she sat before me as though a few years were but yesterday, and new thoughts arose within me and quickened the pulsation at my heart. She spoke no longer with averted look, but discoursed on those past events with that fascinating eloquence of language so characteristic of her—that brilliant, flashing wit which I had observed so many times before.

I forgot all in her presence—I thought of nothing but her beauty and her talents.

“A quadrille,” I said—“dare I ask you to favour me a second time, knowing your antipathy to dancing?”

“Antipathy!”

“Does not my sister assert as much?”

“Your sister is a wilful child,” said she, rising, and accepting my arm; “and her brother considers the etiquette of Royal Dukes worth imitating, for he neglects everybody in the room, except my honoured self.”

A reply rose to my lips—I forebore—I met her glance—I spoke it.

“I have as good a reason as his Royal Highness, and one more irresistible.”

It was not so much the words as the look, that made the red blood mantle to her face and neck. She turned her head away, and the hand upon my arm trembled again.

“Have I not?”

“You are pleased to be complimentary,” said she, in a half-tremulous voice. “I am sorry you have grown so gallant.”

“I have not grown gallant, Mrs. Morton,” I replied,—“far from it. You will believe it true?”

"I will believe nothing, Mr. Elmore."

We commenced the quadrille. She was like a fairy partner for me; and, as I gazed on her, my heart felt fresh and young once more, and I felt how little it would take to make me love her.

Ay, love her! Not as I loved Celia Silvernot, but with a fierce passion that was not all soul—with an ungovernable fire that might last long, or soon burn out, as circumstances fanned it to a flame—or blew it from the altar.

One dance with my cousin Jane, who was in bad spirits and depressed, and then I felt drawn to the young widow again. It was by an influence I could not resist; it was stronger than I had known it at Cliverton—it was a new passion which usurped all control over me, and led me to her side. She was listening to Lord Chilvers, but made room for me on the ottoman as I advanced, and received me with a gracious smile.

Lord Chilvers was attentive in the extreme to the rich widow; but she was absent in her replies, and, after a long searching glance at both of us, he rose and strayed to other friends.

It was with no common satisfaction that I found Mrs. Morton quick to respond to my discourse, and that, for the third time, she was willing to become my partner.

"Once more, monopolizer," she said, with beaming glance.

"Once more!"

I pressed the hand placed confidently in mine, and though her face flushed scarlet, she made no effort to withdraw it. Fascination more powerful, and showing signs of long endurance, and filling up the empty void left by a first love's death! I was her slave that night—and old memories helped to shackle me with chains.

Lady Boyington and daughter—the guests that were becoming thin—the giver of the ball so perfectly at home, and hand-and-glove with every one—the throng of admirers round my queenly sister, who had a word for all, and who concentrated within herself the chief attraction to the gentlemen—were all forgotten in the bright eyes that shone full on me, in the soft melodious voice that seemed tuned to answer love.

Love! Could she ever love me?—a few

years her junior, inexperienced in the world, and dead to fashion, and shut out—save on this night—from fashion's circle, standing alone and isolated, and devoid even of rank and name, without even the power of riches to bring her to my arms.

And yet those eyes—those dark, kindling eyes—the smile that gave back my own—the blush that came unbidden to her cheek—(she who had ever such command of inmost feeling)—the voice that seemed to falter with suppressed emotion. Were they not signs of love, or a consciousness of my attention?

I did not leave her side again that night—I cared not for the meaning interchange of looks between friends of Mrs. Morton, or between my aunt and Agnes. I was spell-bound—I could not force myself away, although I felt certain my particular attachment to the widow had generated more than common notice.

Mrs. Morton was equally as indifferent—if she gave it a thought a single moment. In the dance or promenade, we were constant companions, heedless of any one but ourselves; and when friends joined us, now and

then, there appeared to be a restraint upon us, until we were left alone together. The lady, with whom I had first beheld Mrs. Morton, approached us, leaning on the arm of the gentleman named Percy.

"Here is my escort," Mrs. Morton said to me; "I must bid you, for the present, adieu. For a long time, 'adieu,' rather. Your memory is far from tenacious in its impressions."

"We shall see."

"Spoken meaningly," said she. "Well, adieu."

"Are you ready, Ernestine, dear?" asked the lady, with a significant smile.

Lord Chilvers, Mr. Boyington, Agnes, my aunt, and cousin, came up at the same moment, and added to the group, and made conversation general.

We were all ready to depart; and it was my arm on which she leaned, going down the broad staircase, and my hands that shawled her ere we descended.

The carriages were rattling fast away, and but a few remained.

"Mrs. Morton's carriage."

"Good-bye," I whispered.

She extended her hand, and I retained it

longer in my own than I had a right or title to.

“ I shall see you soon.”

“ I do not believe it,” she answered smiling incredulously.

“ Come Ernestine,” cried the lady.

“ It will be very soon,” I said pressing her hand as I released it.

“ It is a promise, Mr. Elmore,” she said with a vivid blush.

“ Good-bye.”

I left her at the carriage steps, and joined my friends.

“ Lady Boyington’s carriage.”

I parted with them also, promising to look in at Park Lane on the morrow, and then rode home to my hotel, forgetting everything in thoughts of Mrs. Morton—even the star upon the breast !

CHAPTER IV.

ERESTINE!

THE reader will agree with Mrs. Morton in her affirmation made on the evening of the ball at Alton House, that my memory was far from tenacious in its impressions, when I inform him that I spent the next day alone, in my own private room at the hotel, and did not call at Cavendish Square and see the enchantress of the preceding night.

But it was not for the fading away of the strong impression made on me the night before, not for an unwillingness to seek her out as I had done at Cliverton, not for a want of courtesy in my attention: but for a thousand thoughts that held me back and kept my strong will in check.

Why should I use every endeavour to see her again, and take advantage of every opportunity to bring her to my presence? Was I not forging for myself new fetters with which to load myself, a captive, and for as little purpose? I could love her mayhap, and in the new love drown the afflictions of the past, but, was she not already engaged to the stern looking man I had met her riding with in the Park—had not rumour named him for her future husband, and would not the lying tongues of scandal hiss forth—I but sought her for her wealth, did I seek to rival him in her affections?

Yet I could not forget her, although I formed a resolution to remain alone that day, and to restrain the temptation that with every thought of yester-night lured me to go forth—I could not frame my mind to read or write, or even to gaze out of the window into the street—I burned as with the fever from which I had but lately recovered at ‘The Rest.’

I tried to crush my vanity—if it were vanity that glowed within me—by picturing myself a dupe, and Mrs. Morton a flirt, who laughed at

my susceptibility in my absence, and added my name to her long list of conquests.

If this were true, what a natural actress was she!—and why did she blush and tremble?

The day passed, and the morrow came. I had spent a sleepless night, and had thought of every incident of the ball at Alton House—each single word she had uttered, each glance, and look, and smile, and my inflexible resolves gave way.

There could be no harm in calling at Cavendish Square—besides, had I not promised to do so soon.

I sallied forth in the direction of Oxford-Street, turned into Cavendish Square, and stood before a large mansion, the number of which agreed with the address she had given me at Cliverton.

I knocked, and a servant in dark green livery responded to my summons. Mrs. Morton was from home. I left my card, and, irritable and disappointed for all my platonic affection and self-imposed asceticism, set off for Park Lane, and spent the morning with my relatives and sister, and half-an-hour with Sir John, who was cutting fine points to all his

finger-nails, with the valet of the powerful build close to his side, keeping a watchful eye upon the knife.

There was so little rationality in the baronet's discourse that morning, that I was sincerely glad when Twidger slid his arm through Sir John's, and took him up-stairs to see a bran-new sun, that Sir John had been expecting these three weeks or more. Agnes and Lady Boyington were full of pleasant satire upon my marked attention to Mrs. Morton at the Ball, and cousin Jane sat and worked at an embroidery-frame, and said very little, one way or the other.

Lady Boyington commingled much sober advice with her sallies at me.

"What a good match it would be for you, my dear nephew!" she said, "for I hear Mrs. Morton is immensely rich. She is a haughty lady, certainly; and would you believe it, though I have met her more than a score of times, the night before last was the first time she ever condescended to address me? But still what a good match it would be, Luke, considering your circumstances."

"'Considering my circumstances,'—sage

'reason for a 'marriage made in heaven,' worthy aunt," I replied.

"Marriages have been made for reasons similar, I have heard," said Agnes.

"Now and then," remarked Jane, quietly.

Later in the day, Lord Chilvers drove by me in Pall-mall, saw me, drew up, and, leaning forward from his cabriolet, stretched out his hand.

"Ah! Elmore—lucky I saw you!" he cried; "I have been to your hotel, and could glean no tidings of your whereabouts. I start for the continent to-morrow or the next day."

"So soon!"

"I am a true wanderer. Will you spend a last evening with me?"

I stood framing my excuse, when he said quickly—

"Are you engaged?"

"No, my lord."

"Then you will not refuse me—it is a farewell supper—all male friends—you will come?"

"For half-an-hour—I shall be most happy," replied I, giving up all hope of an excuse.

"Bravely spoken," he said. "Nine or ten in the evening is the proposed time, Elmore. I regret it is not a dance, and Mrs. Morton is not invited."

He showed his white teeth and laughed merrily. I coloured.

"You struck a fair blow for the pretty widow," said he—"and, between ourselves, made more than a common impression. I have never seen Mrs. Morton in better spirits; and yet before your arrival—and a plaguey late arrival it was—she was as glum as a cod-fish, and as ill-tempered as a spiteful kitten. As for dancing, she did not 'feel inclined' to dance. I say, Elmore."

"My lord."

"There's something I don't exactly fathom in all this!"

"I am sorry I cannot assist you."

"Very—I dare say," said he, drily. "Will you ride?"

"I am within a dozen yards of my hotel, and will not trouble you, my lord."

"Well, to-night, remember. *Au revoir.*"

"*Au revoir.*"

At ten o'clock in the evening of the same

day I fulfilled my promise, and made a second call at Alton House. I was ushered into a small but luxuriously furnished room, in which were assembled about a dozen young men, only one of whom I remembered to have seen on the Thursday. Lord Chilvers introduced me to the guests. They were all pale-faced, high cheek-boned men—a few young, and one or two grey-haired.

“There is good news for you, Elmore,” said Chilvers, in a whisper, to me.

“For me, my lord?”

“To be sure,” he said. “Blankley”—to a young man of short stature, and highly-glazed eyes—“continue the story. I have no doubt Mr. Elmore will be interested.”

He nudged me familiarly with his elbow, as he made mention of my name.

“I think you must have jumped rather hastily to a conclusion, Blankley,” said another guest.

“Not at all,” said Blankley. “I tell you Sir George Harvey came into the club, raving like a madman. I was reading the *Times*, by the window, and was unperceived, or he would not have given voice to his complaints, you may be assured.”

"Not *very* likely," drily remarked one of the elder gentlemen.

"He called her 'ungrateful' and 'cruel Ernestine!'—that's Mrs. Morton's christian name, you know—and then he espied me, and must needs pick a quarrel—as if I could help it!—and so we've arranged a friendly meeting at Chalk Farm. You may depend upon it, the match is broken off."

"Not a doubt of it."

"Do you hear that?" said Chilvers. "Now, Elmore, I'll back the Favourite against the Field!"

The conversation dwelt for some time upon Mrs. Morton, and there was not one disparaging remark made reflective on her character; and, had there been a stain to show, or a light scandal to make much of, such men as these would have been ready enough to declare it. They spoke of her wealth, dwelt a little on her capriciousness, enumerated the many matches which had been town-talk since her widowhood, but said nothing prejudicial concerning her; and I felt a secret satisfaction that her name was uncommingled with calumnious report.

Lord Chilvers proposed cards, after supper,

and I found myself seated at a table, engaged in Lansquenet, with wine flowing before me, and liveried servants attending at the back.

Too much absorbed in vainly endeavouring to conjecture reasons for the abrupt termination to Mrs. Morton's engagement—terminated that very afternoon—inexperienced in the game itself, and confused by the loud sallies, and coarse jests of the friends of Chilvers, I rose from the table at a late hour, a considerable loser.

"You will not leave us at so early an hour, Elmore," entreated Lord Chilvers, as he received my acknowledgement for sixty pounds.

"You must excuse me."

"To-morrow you will claim your revenge, of course?"

"I am content, Lord Chilvers;" I remarked, "and am of firm will enough to say, I shall never touch a card again."

"Pooh! absurd. Your loss——?"

"I am not concerned about it," I replied, hastily, "although my purse could ill-afford such a continuance of ill-fortune."

"You do not like cards?"

"I can scarcely remember gambling, my lord."

"Gambling! Do you call a game at Lansquenet, gambling?" he asked in some surprise.

"To me."

"Ah! I forgot about the Will."

He turned carelessly away, with a 'Good evening,' and after a cool farewell of the guests, I took my departure. As I went down the wide stone-steps, into the street, a private carriage drew up, and the Duke of —— leaped forth.

As he passed, he stared haughtily in my face. I made a half salutation, which he heeded not, but entered the house.

"Sister Agnes,—sister Agnes," I muttered, "is it this red-faced, coarse featured Royal Highness, that flatters you by his attention?"

It was plain the night had scarce begun, and I felt an inward wish, that I had delayed my departure by one half-hour, so that I might have seen more of the character of the exalted personage who passed me on the steps.

But I had soon forgotten sister Agnes, his Royal Highness, and my first debt at cards in Mrs. Morton. She seemed shining before

me, like a vision, and smiling hope and love. I read upon the radiancy of her face, the one balm for my grief—the antidote against the broken vows of Celia Silvernot. I felt too—unworthy reason!—how it would sting them all at Wharnby House to learn that I was about to be married to Mrs. Morton, so soon after my first engagement was abruptly put an end to.

To marry her! As if I had more than an illusion upon which to base so bold an aspiration.

Another sleepless night and listless, apathetic morning, scorched up with inward fever.

Resolved at one moment and unresolved at the next, the morning passed by, marked by no decisive action. The bells rang out for church, but my thoughts were not of sabbath calmness, and I let their metal tongues ring on their summons to the crowd of worshippers, and paid no heed. The day seemed but as other days to me. I could but find one theme to brood upon, and that was pre-eminent and powerful. At one instant it appeared as if Mrs. Morton were but a stranger

to me, and at another, as if I could risk life itself to gain her smiles and bask in the sunshine of her favour. The day passed. On the evening of the Monday, her power over me asserted itself with greater force, and I seemed led as by the hand of genii onwards. I would go and see her! She might not be from home on this particular evening, and I had promised to call upon her for old friendship's sake. ; there could be no harm in that, even if the laws of fashionable society were slightly outraged by my going.

It was night when I issued from my hotel. It was a hot, sultry summer's night, and the sky was heavy overhead. I resolved to walk, and so strolled leisurely towards Cavendish Square, along the crowded, lighted streets.

Why did my heart beat so violently as I stood before the door? Could it be possible that Celia Silvernot was forgotten—that that fierce passion of my wild youth and my first manhood was fading out, and a new love coming in its place?

Mrs. Morton was within. I was ushered into a brilliantly-lighted sitting-room, and left alone. Presently the rustle of a silk dress set

my heart beating, and Mrs. Morton entered.

"At last!" she said, extending her hand as I rose to greet her.

"I have made good the promise at Lord Chilvers' ball, Mrs. Morton," I replied.

"I am flattered by your keeping me so long in kind remembrance," said she, looking down.

"Ever an accusation against my memory, dear madam?"

"Not a very stern accuser, Mr. Elmore," she answered; "but you will join us? Two ladies and a gentleman form my little party, and you must not flit away from Cavendish Square before you have hardly crossed the threshold of my home."

"I thank you, but——"

"Oh! that 'but!'" she cried. "You are in evening dress, and have no excuse."

"I have walked hither."

"The streets are dry and my friends are few, and will not put you through the ordeal of their criticism."

I had ever an objection to sudden invitations, and still hesitated.

"Mr. Dartford is not here to assist me in

my solicitation," said Mrs Morton, somewhat piqued.

"It was not Mr. Dartford who persuaded me to stay that evening at Cliverton," I said earnestly—"that happy evening at Thornville Villa!"

"You will stay, then?" she asked in a low voice.

"If it please you," I replied, offering her my arm.

We passed into an adjoining room, occupied by two ladies and a young man of about my own age.

One of the ladies I remembered to have seen with Mrs. Morton at the ball, and the young man was the Percy, of vacant expression, alluded to in the last chapter. The second lady was of the middle age, and mother of Mr. Percy Wilton.

Mrs. Morton introduced me to her visitors, by whom I was graciously received.

"Mrs. Morton will now favour us with her promised song," said Mr. Wilton.

She shook her head, and laughed.

"Oh! do, Ernestine, dear!" cried the ladies.

"I never sing—I am out of practice," she replied.

"But you will sing?" pleaded I.

"But I will not, Mr. Elmore!" said she, gaily.

"There is no excuse for Mrs. Morton," said I to her; "despite my fickle memory, I have not forgotten some charming songs at Thornville Villa."

"Charming, Mr. Elmore!" with a smile.

"Yes, charming!"

"Surely, I cannot refuse, after so great a compliment."

She sang; and I stood by her side, and turned over the leaves of the music, and looked down upon her bright face, and my ears drank in every note of her ringing melodious voice. It was the past night at Cliverton I was living over again, and the silvery tones brought all before me as I listened.

Presently, another lady and gentleman arrived; and then two young ladies, with their brother; and then an old gentleman, with three daughters.

"This is an evening party, Mrs. Morton," I said reproachfully.

"Not so, Mr. Elmore," she replied; "they are members of my own quiet circle. I seldom accept invitations out, and it is generally known that I do not; and so my friends take pity on my loneliness."

I could more especially converse with Mrs. Morton as the number of guests increased.

She was so beautiful, of such glowing loveliness, that every thought was attracted to her—I could but gaze upon her beauty, and grow more entranced with every instant.

There was a card-table formed, and the greater part of the guests had circled round it—so we were left comparatively alone.

"Will you join?" she asked.

"I am not partial to card-playing; but I am detaining you."

"No; I do not like cards."

So we sat together on the couch, and I felt as in a dream, with the visitors and gliding servants, and all but the young widow by my side, parts of the vision in which I was wrapped.

"When do you return to Wharnby, Mr. Elmore?"

"Return!" I exclaimed; "I have not thought of returning."

"No fair enslaver at Cliverton or Wharnby?" she asked, with her large eyes so full and brilliant, seeking to penetrate my secret.

"I am not worth the enslaving, dear madam."

"An evasive reply, Mr. Elmore," she said quickly.

"It is the true one," I answered; "in the new sphere into which I have descended, I am set apart from all *enslavers*."

"Mr. Elmore," said Mrs. Morton, "you affix a cruel stigma on our sex. Women do not seek to enslave, as a general rule, they are sought. You speak of your new sphere, too, as if your old title—that of the son of a rich man—would but have helped to gain a young girl's love."

"My brilliant qualities would have aided me but little," I answered bitterly.

"You are unpretending. I have known many brainless fops who have thought themselves born to conquer and command, and yet you ——"

She stopped.

"Pray continue!"

"No, I will not flatter you," she said, laughingly.

"It may but assure me."

"Oh! when the right lady crosses your path, assurance will be born again."

"I do not know that."

"Doubter."

"Supposing the lady were above me in rank, in station, in the opinion of the world," I said hurriedly; "supposing that she were rich, how could I assure her it was not her money I was seeking, it was alone the rich treasure of her love?"

"Each woman has power to detect the real from the false in the lover at her feet; it is her own fault if she accept the false," said she, colouring and looking down.

"Then I am assured," said I, "and the dawning of my love may be already in the East."

I said it with an unsteady voice, conscious that the slight, fairy-like figure of Mrs. Morton was near me, and that she sat with roseate cheeks, almost fearful of my burning glances. There was a silence between us, broken by the murmurs of the card-players in the distance.

Had I had the will, there was a lack of self-command, which, at the moment, no influence could have controlled. Looking upon her, my whole soul seemed transfused, and to have but one impression, and my heart beat loudly and painfully.

Silence still—neither a word to say. The heightened colour still upon her cheek—her face averted—the eyes bent upon the ground—the bosom heaving—the white hand tremulous.

I found my voice at last; it was so deep and strange a voice that it was hardly mine.

“You give me hope that all will not deny me when my time for love arrives,” I said.

“When the time comes, there is ever hope.”

“The time may be at hand.”

“So soon!”

“The time has come, Ernestine!”

She bowed her head, more and more, to hide her crimsoned face; but the white hand I had clasped in mine, lay a willing prisoner within it.

“Ernestine,” I whispered in an agitated voice,

"Not now—not now," she cried, gently disengaging her hand, and rising.

"You do not cast away ——?" I began.

"We are observed."

She moved towards the card-table, and stood looking on the play, and I was left alone.

One cold, icy feeling, and then my love more powerful, and my brain more heated.

Throughout the evening she studiously avoided me. She passed from the card-table, and engaged in an animated conversation with some ladies, clustered near the piano. I watched her keenly, with the jealous eyes of one who had a claim upon her. I saw that the light manner was forced—that her flow of spirits was far from real, and that as if fearful of disclosing it to me; she scrupulously evaded meeting my fixed glance.

She sang again, but her voice was not of its accustomed firmness; and more than one note was struck incorrectly, and jarred harshly.

The guests began to separate at an early hour, but I lingered. As they thinned, Mrs. Morton's agitation grew more apparent. Did she dread the disclosure of my love?

The last guests—Mr. Percy Wilton and his mother—took their departure, and yet we

were not alone—the young lady named Helen, still sat at the table, and carelessly turned over the pages of a book.

She was evidently staying with Mrs. Morton; and one inquiring gaze at her friend, appeared to me indicative of some surprise at my prolonged intrusion. Mrs. Morton, with a strong effort of her old self-command, resumed her place before the piano, and played the waltz we had had at the Cliverton Ball.

“Do you remember that, Mr. Elmore?”

“Well,” said I, advancing to her side, and leaning over her; “it was the first step, I hope, to future happiness.”

She bent over the keys till her raven curls almost touched them.

“So silent!—denying me even a single word?”

She looked up—and in her blushing face, I read the reflex of my love—the confirmation of my deepest hopes.

“What can I say?—You would not—would not ——”

The opening of the door startled us.

“Where are you going, Helen?”

As she stood looking into my face with all her new-born love within her eyes, and I gazed down upon her, scarce daring to draw breath, lest she should fade and vanish into air—so unreal seemed all my bliss—Helen re-entered the room, and paused, irresolute whether to advance or again retire.

There was a merry smile kept back on her pursed red lips, as she surveyed us.

“Do not go. Helen,” said Mrs. Morton ;
“I—I—have to present Mr. Elmore in a new character to you, dear.”

“I can guess it—I can guess it !” she cried
—“I have seen it on both your faces all the evening.”

“Guess all but the deep sensations of pure happiness our hearts are throbbing with, dear Ernestine,” I said.

“Ah ! all but that !” she cried, returning my loving glance —“all but that, dear Luke !”

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CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST LOVE.

STILL like a dream seemed it to me, that I should be engaged, and that my marriage-day was fixed. Like a dream, and yet the reality was powerful; and, throughout the whirl of sense and brain, the lovely figure of my destined wife charmed me and entranced me.

At times—coming suddenly upon me in her absence, in the cold grey mornings when sleep was not for me, or in the silent darkness of the night—a morbid depression fell upon my nerves, a cold shuddering crept through every limb, which not all the looking forward to the glowing future which my life promised could throw off or set aside. There was a gloomy self-depreciation, as if I were a traitor, or had

sworn falsely, or had won a woman's heart, without a heart to give back in return. But these sinkings back into my old self wore off as day after day saw me faithful attendant on Mrs. Morton, and devoted to her every wish.

And Ernestine? He would have been an anchorite indeed, who could have known her long, who could have sat by her side often, conscious that she loved him and not have sought to prove how deep was his appreciation of the priceless gift of her affection. I could but love her with my whole soul, in return for the passionate attachment which she demonstrated for me. I could but have done so in very gratitude, had I never had one feeling warmer than a brother's. To me she was no longer Mrs. Morton, the beautiful young widow—fascinating, eloquent, and talented—she was my Ernestine, the new idol of my worship, my betrothed.

The very evidence of her affection appeared to be bestowed unworthily—I did not feel her equal, or to have a just right to all the love she lavished on me. I could believe now, that she had loved me from the first night at Cliverton, attracted perhaps by my very con-

trast to other young men, who at the time were fighting for her hand. How reverently she listened to my plans for our new life, which we spent hours laying out, her hands upon my arm, her glowing face fondly raised towards me !

Entering the square, I found she was ever a watcher for my coming, behind the curtains of the window, and flew to meet me as though I had been a wanderer for years.

A month flew by and I was within a fortnight of my marriage day. Every time I made chance morningcalls at Lady Boyington's, I found signs of preparation for the great event, going on within. I had informed them a few days after my proposal, of my intended change in life, and had received all congratulations on the same. Mrs. Morton had accepted several invitations from Lady Boyington, and Agnes and she were like sisters in their long conferences together.

One morning, with the appointed day not far distant from me, I sat with my sister on that couch whereon I had heard her describe her fashionable life, late in the evening of one Saturday.

"Luke," said Agnes; "have you written to Edward, concerning this engagement?"

"I wrote a week since," I replied; "and have received an answer, that he with Mr. Vandon, may honour me upon my wedding-day."

"Vandon," peevishly said Agnes; "I have not forgotten Vandon."

"I did not desire to see him, Aggy," I answered; "there is ever a cloud upon me in his presence, and he would embitter even my marriage festival. But I could but ask him."

"Has he replied?"

"Yes, thanking me, and wishing me happiness."

"He can leave 'The Rest,' now — he is not the hater of the world, now the patron so long mimicked and made his tool, lives not to mark his hypocrisy and deceit."

"Let the past die," I replied, moodily.

"Be it so — I will meet him cordially, although——" she set her small white teeth close; "although I hate him."

After a moment's silence, she said:—

"Let us change the subject. Do you not

find Mrs. Morton, a graceful substitute for Celia Silvernot?"

"I find she has a truer love for me."

"Oh! she is a dear creature, and what a pretty sister she will make me!" she said; "and what a lucky fellow you have proved yourself!"

"I am fortunate in having won her heart."

"No less than in rising to more than common affluence," added Agnes.

"The Elmores, that is a brother and sister of that name, have both had Fortune to smile upon them, Aggy," remarked I.

"Both!"

"Yes—for is there not another wedding advancing to the present? and will not Agnes Elmore soon be Mrs. Boyington, eventually to change again to Lady B.?"

"We do not advance in our courtship," returned she, smiling, "besides, I have had grander offers."

"Concerning which, you have not had sufficient confidence in your brother to inform him."

"I did not accept them," she said, quietly.

"May I inquire the names of the parties, favouring you by their proposals?"

"The last, is Lord Chilvers."

"Lord Chilvers!"

"Yes, three weeks since he laid his name, fortunes and estate at my feet. Generous man!" she added, ironically.

"That was before he went to Paris with my sixty pounds," said I, laughing, "and you had the courage to decline."

"Why, yes," she said, "the name was hackneyed, the fortunes were varied and bedraggled, and the estate was deeply mortgaged,—so the offer was not a brilliant one."

"The name itself would have won you once, Aggy."

"No, no—I think not," she answered.

"Will it ever be Lady Boyington, Aggy?" I asked, seriously, "come, sister, have faith in me for once, and unveil a corner of that scheming ambitious little heart."

"You will not betray me?"

"Have I ever done so?"

"Have you ever had an opportunity," cried Agnes, merrily, "well, I will for once be confidential and sisterly. I shall never usurp the name of Boyington, brother Luke."

“But, Agnes ——”

“But, Luke, there is an end to questioning,” she said, holding up a jewelled finger,—“I have no more replies to make.”

“Nor I inquiries,” I said, “yet Agnes, will you listen, I do not say take a brother’s advice? It will be none the less worth hearing, and considering, though it come from a brother you have not truly known all your life.”

“Now, dear Luke, you should set aside that solemn air for ever, being on the point of marriage,” said Agnes, “no grave-digger wears so dismal a countenance as yours, when you attempt to moralize.”

“Still hear me, Aggy.”

“Well,” with a forced attitude of attention.

“Be not too ambitious,” I said, “soar not with your weak pinions, to a dazzling height, a fall from which may crush you. You are, despite your worldliness, easily led aside when your will falls in with your ambition—I ask you, but to take heed,—for I can but fear for you, Agnes!”

A shade passed over her face, a shade that changed the whole expression of her countenance, and gave it a sorrowful, womanly look,

that I had never seen before. It was but transitory—she raised her head, and laid her hand on mine, saying,—

“You are a good brother, Luke, and perhaps, I might have been less wilful, had we been more together in the far-off days of ‘The Rest.’ But do not fear for me—do not—do not *think of me* too much. No matter what station I shall take, or what position occupy, I shall take it as my choice, and seek to be happy in it! There, enough of sermonizing.”

“I believe I am glad it is not to be Mrs. George Boyington,” I said, reflectively;—“although his foppishness might have sobered down, and, as a married man, he might have been a passable member of society. But I shall ever regret that you were not Mrs. Redwin.”

“I should have made Paul a capricious wife, and teased him out of all love for me,” she said; “it is better as it is.”

“Then, there was your own cousin Jack Witherby,” I remarked. “I should not have objected to an engagement in that quarter. He will be a fine young fellow when he comes home from sea.”

"The Witherbys and Boyingtons are all impressionable in Park Lane," replied Agnes ; "and little cousin Jack used to fly upon special service for me, like Cupid's own messenger. I miss him very much. Yet, what a silly fellow he was !"

Poor Jack Witherby ! fostering your romantic fancies in the night-watch, or at the lonely mast-head, with sea and sky for prospect, it is as well you know not cousin Agnes's estimation of your character !

"There's Jane, too—but I shall make you vain."

"Make *me* vain !" I cried, in some surprise.

"Oh ! Mr. Innocent," said Agnes, "you do not know, you cannot guess?"

"I am really in the most total darkness."

"Well, then, I fancy Jane was half-inclined to fall in love with her grim-faced cousin Luke. She was always so full of your praises, and had so many things to relate about you ; and when she heard of your engagement to Mrs. Morton, she walked steadily to her room, and no one saw her for three hours or more. When I did see her, she had been crying—I am sure of it."

"I am not vain enough to believe that I was an unconscious agent to her grief," I replied; "and God forbid that it should be so. I have hardly paid her the attention due to one so closely related to me, and so cannot give my sister credit for much penetration. I am sorry you have mentioned it at all."

"Will you go to Ernestine, phlegmatic, grave young man?" said Agnes. "The carriage is ordered, and I am going with Lady Boyington and Sir John to the drive—that is, if Sir John can be persuaded to go out in rational costume."

I left Park Lane, and returned to my hotel. A servant was anxiously lingering about the hall for me.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Elmore—but a gentleman and lady have been waiting for you more than half-an-hour. They called early in the morning, but you had just gone out; and so they came again a little while ago, and the gentleman said 'that they would stop until you did come,' and so I took them to your room."

"Did the gentleman leave his name?"

"No, Sir."

Unable to fathom the mystery, I ascended the stairs, and turned the handle of the door of my sitting-room. Two well-known figures rose from their position by the window as I entered, both in that deep mourning indicative of some recent loss. They were those of the rector of Wharnby, and his sister Celia! I stood transfixed upon discerning them, and turned as white as death.

“Mr. Sil-Silvernot, this is an unexpected visit.”

I could not express my sense of Celia being there—a few paces from me; I knew not how to address one word to her, and stood looking on the carpet at my feet.

“Luke,” said the rector, advancing to me, and taking my unproffered hand, “I could not leave London without making one more attempt to see you. I have brought my sister—nay, she has wished to come, for the sake of her own name and honour. Celia, pray keep your seat.”

Celia, who had remained standing, with gaze directed like my own, upon the ground, mechanically obeyed, and resumed her place by the window, calm, grave, and silent.

"Luke, there is much explanation required on both sides."

"None, none, Mr. Silvernot," I answered; "the time for that is gone for ever. Aggrieved as I have been, or as I *think* I may have been to you, there is no explanation can do more than revive old injuries and broken faiths. It is my wish that we part as we have met."

"There has been some misconstruction—some more than misconstruction," said the rector, wringing his hands piteously, "and I *demand* an explanation."

"It is for you to make it, then, for I, sir, have no accusation ready to my lip."

He became more dignified at my implacable reserve.

"Mr. Elmore, you must not mistake the object of our visit," said he; "it is with no desire to force ourselves upon you with the claim of an old friendship. It is but to vindicate our name that we have come hither this day."

"I listen, sir."

"Your own engagement, and the knowledge that we have of it, will suggest to you that no unworthy motive has actuated us in

this visit," said the rector; "we seek not to renew any tie gone past, we are here but to explain."

"Mrs. Silvernot gave me all explanation worthy of the title," I said, sharply.

The rector paused, and said in a less firm voice—

"Silence, sir; Mrs. Silvernot and my dear mother is dead."

"Your pardon, Mr. Silvernot," I said in some confusion, "I did not know you had experienced so great a loss. I trust you will forgive the harshness with which I made mention of her name."

He coughed, and blew his nose, and cleared his throat, and began again.

"My dear Luke—I beg pardon, Mr. Elmore—you may have felt naturally hurt, insulted, humiliated on that day you saw my poor mother for the last time; but when I came to 'The Rest' with the assurance that her opposition could be removed, that *others* did not desire the breaking off the engagement, why—why did you refuse to see me?"

I gasped for breath, and, reeling to a chair, clutched at the back of it for support.

"What is the meaning? I—I do not understand all this."

"When in my last message I sent up all particulars by Mr. Vaudon—you remember the day?—why still deny to see or speak to me, or write back one poor word, if you were not too ready to leap at an excuse?"

"Vaudon—all particulars by Vaudon!" I murmured, staring vacantly at the rector.

"Yes; did I not even write a last message, willing to give you every proof, and every chance?"

"No, no—it is a juggling lie, or some devil has stepped between me and you, and blasted the last hope held out to me. I know not, remember not, one word of all this you are telling me."

He looked incredulous.

"It is for Celia to explain the rest," said the rector, moving to the other window, and gazing out into the street.

With shaking limbs, as though old and palsy-stricken, I almost tottered to where she sat; and, for the first time, gazed at that face I knew so well—that face I had at one time pictured gladdening my home, and beaming on me all my life.

"There is but little to explain," she said, in a low, firm voice; and her eyes, for a moment, met my own, and then were shadowed by their lashes; "and Mr. Elmore may hardly do me the justice to believe it."

"Every word, Miss Silvernot—every word."

"It was my mother's wish, you are aware, Mr. Elmore, that our engagement should be broken off, after that reverse of fortune which the Will of your father brought about—it was not my own! Pledged to you, no change in your social position had a right to change *me*; and I had never dreamed of it."

"And yet ——"

"Do not misjudge me, sir," she said, hastily; "let me say all uninterrupted. Do not agitate me by your wild manner and excited questions. Knowing we are speaking of what is gone, and that which is irrevocable, we should both be calm."

"Gone, and irrevocable," I groaned. "Proceed, Miss Silvernot—I will interrupt no more."

"Unless you had been engaged, or married, I could not, conscientiously, have sought this interview," she continued; "now, I look upon

it as my duty. If you had written, sought me out, spoken with my brother, as—as I thought you would have done, it might not have been better, but it would have been more just.”

Taking a long breath, she resumed—

“I was unaware of my mother’s firm determination to annul the tie between us. I had thought that the statement of my own fixed purpose to adhere to my promise, would have shaken hers. The constant excitement, harass, and perplexity, had, that very morning on which the interview took place, thrown me upon a sick bed.”

“You were ill!” I shouted; “It was not your wish to keep back from saving me from despair—your mother never told you that I desired a meeting—that I waited—God! how many centuries did I wait counted my agony of suspense!—for you to come, and sever with your own lips the last thread to which my love still clung!”

“You waited—you did not know that I was ill?”

“I knew alone that I was to be cast aside.”

There was a long struggle with her calmness; she could appreciate the depth of my

strong suffering, for she had known the fervour of my love.

"I heard the door close, and the whole truth flashed upon me," said Celia, after a long silence. "When I recovered strength, I asked for my brother—I bade him go to your home, and tell you that even at a mother's bidding, I could not for get that I had pledged myself to be yourwife, and that I bade you to look forward, relying on—on—my love."

I groaned.

"But you cast us off—you refused to see or hear us; you came to London after your illness; you were willing to abide by my dear mother's wish, that we should part. This new engagement has proved *that*."

"It has proved nothing!" I cried. "I have been made a dupe, deceived by false friends at my own home—friends who had not heart enough to drag me from my misery. I would have been contented with a single word, a look! In my conviction of your wish to set my love aside, I had sworn on that cruel morning, never to seek the renewal of the friendship held so long with all—never to

enter Wharnby House again. I knew alone that he, that old friend, was at 'The Rest,' but not that he had come to bring me comfort—to heal the wounds I bled from. I could not have listened to consolation, such as I expected he would have to give, and I would not see him at a mere request. If letter or hope were given to me through that messenger of evil—it was kept back to break my heart!"

I flung my arms above my head in my vehemence, and then threw myself wildly at her feet.

"Oh! Celia, by the memory of that old love, believe I was not altogether heartless; believe that even now I love you as I have loved you from a child. It was the great ambition of my life to call you mine. I sought no other happiness; I looked for no greater blessing this side of the grave! I love but you—there is no——"

"Hush, hush!" she cried; "not an apostate unto all! Our re-union can never come. Now, I do not wish it. Remember," she said, rising, "you have sworn vows to another, and even now you are unfaithful."

I rose with the full conviction of this truth. I felt how weak were my efforts to break through this web of circumstance.

The little rector, fairly crying, came from the window, and pressed my hands in his.

"May you be happy in your marriage, dear Luke. I have no doubt that in Mrs. Morton you have chosen worthily. God bless you, my dear boy. I had wished it otherwise—but—but ——"

The tears were streaming down his face so fast, that he tore his hands away, and dashed through the door, leaving me with Celia.

She extended me her hand. The interview had been too much for her, and she had drawn her thick veil completely down.

"Good-bye, Luke. How much better it would have been for you and me, if you had never spoken of your love that ride home from Cliverton. I pray every happiness may be yours. Good-bye."

"For ever!" I cried, kissing passionately the extended hand.

"It may be so," she said, gently withdrawing it; "our paths diverge from this point, and may never cross again."

“One more—one last question!”

She stopped in her passage to the door.

“When I lay ill—when fever deprived me of all sense and will, did you come in the night, with your brother, and look upon me in my great affliction?”

“Yes,” she murmured.

“God bless you for that, Celia, and—good-bye. It is for ever! I feel it is for ever!”

And it was! As I know it now, writing these chronicles, so knew I by foreknowledge, that I should never see her more, when she passed out of the room, and I dropped silently, heavily into the chair she had quitted, and covered my shaking hands over my white face!

CHAPTER VI.

PASSING CLOUDS AT HOME, AND PASSING
FIGURES IN THE STREETS.

"LUKE, dear, how pale you are to-night. I fear you are unwell."

"Unwell, Ernestine!"

"You are really very pale," said she, looking at me anxiously; "something has disturbed you. You look wild, and you answer absently. Have I offended you?"

She nestled closer to my side, keeping her affectionate glance still fixed upon me.

"Offended me, dear Ernestine," I answered, passing my arm round her sylph-like waist; "have you been anything but kind and more than kind since our engagement then, that you ask so strange and inconsiderate a question?"

"Luke, you are keeping a secret from me," she cried; "you must not deceive me by false words and reasonings. — You will tell me?"

"I will tell you whom I have seen this morning, dearest," I replied, "if that be the explanation you require — I have seen Mr. Silvernot, the rector, and his sister, Celia."

"Celia!"

She sprang from my encircling arm, and looked with her great black eyes searchingly and even suspiciously at me.

"What did they want with you, Luke?— What did *she* say?—What did she mean by visiting you with her brother?"

I was silent.

"Mr. Elmore — Sir — Luke," she cried, trembling with agitation; "why are you silent? Speak, sir, I command you!"

The peremptory mandate was uttered with a feeble voice, and her red lips had changed to an ashen whiteness, though the eyes were kindling with a lurid light.

"Ernestine, you are jealous."

"Tell me, tell me," she reiterated, petu-

lantly; "what did that girl seek an interview with you for?"

"I will tell you, Ernestine, but you must listen with greater calmness, or you will misjudge both her and me. Knowing of my engagement, she came with her brother to convince me that I had misinterpreted her actions, and that I had taken a false estimate of many occurrences at Wharnby, and been my own enemy in accusing and condemning them. Having thrown a light on many things that heretofore had been to me but blackest night, she parted with me coldly and dispassionately."

"It was a trick!" she said, her small white jewelled hands nervously clasping and unclasping.

"You do not know her?"

"You do well to take her part," she cried, vehemently, as she sat some distance from me now, with rapidly heaving bosom; "you can admire the acting in the actress."

"Ernestine," I said reproachfully.

"Go on, sir—go on with your story—I am calm and unaffected by it."

She panted as she spoke, and bit her lip with her white teeth.

"That is the sequel of the story. Is it so terrible?"

"No, it is not all—you know that it is a story half completed, and you seek to blind me! These explanations were concerning the reasons that had broken off your engagement to her, were they not?" she asked, turning on me with flashing eyes.

"They were; but hear me. I ——"

She snatched the hand that I had sought to touch, and cried,

"Continue this affecting love tale. What did you say?—what grief, and prayer, and entreaty had you to reply?"

"Madam, I could do no less than express my sorrow that I should so unworthily have judged her," I continued, more coldly; "I had loved her once too dearly not to feel some pangs of conscience and remorse. Nay, Ernestine, I will be true to you, and tell all that you have a right to know—In the emotion, the madness of the moment, I flung myself at her feet and raved."

She sprang from the couch, her form dilating with passion, her black jetty ringlets pushed

back from her face, her hands clenched, her glance fiery and wild.

“It was easy to forget—it was easy to glibly talk of love for me when she was beyond your reach! Why jealousy and spite could but have prompted such feelings as your own! It was cowardly and cruel. And yet for him I would have sacrificed. I—no more—go sir, go! Leave me here—I never wish to see you more.”

She staggered to the door—her trembling hand reached out to touch it—she paused, and then sank crouching to the floor, with bent head, and hands folded despairingly upon her lap, and gave way to a passionate outburst of bitter, scalding tears.

I flew towards her, and attempted to raise her. With an indignant cry, she pushed my hands aside.

“Ernestine!—dear Ernestine!”—I cried again, essaying to raise her; “you will not hear me out—you will not let me tell you of all the self-accusations I heaped upon my head, for the folly I have spoken of, when reason came back to me; when I remembered that my whole heart was yours, and that I

loved you above all. You will not, you cannot think that I would have sought your hand, had I not been devoted to you, and held you as my brightest hope. Ernestine, by all that is holy and sacred in my eyes, it was but a moment's passion, and its remembrance now endears me to you more than ever, even if those showering tears did not tell me how strong is the affection I have won, and proved how sensitive a little heart is beating for me !”

She knew by the deep, tremulous accents of my voice, that there was no alloy with the truth I murmured in her ears, and though she sobbed more than ever as I spoke, she let me raise her from my feet, and press her to my breast.

“ I am forgiven, Ernestine ?”

“ Forgiven, Luke !” she said, looking up through her swimming tears ; “ yes, what can I do ever but forgive ? Is not love made up of forgiveness ?”

She dashed some crystal drops from her silken lashes, and held up her quivering lips, to which the bright red had returned, as proof of reconciliation.

"It is our first quarrel, and our last," I said, as I sat by her side, her hand locked fast in mine; "is it not, dear Ernestine?"

"I hope so."

"Unless there is some tiny secret of your own, dearest, to make me jealous in my turn."

She sighed heavily. Such a deep, soul-drawn sigh, that I cried, alarmed,—“Ernestine!”

"I have not recovered, dear Luke, from my agitation," she said, "and my head aches—how you have made my head ache, cruel Luke!"

"You do not sigh because you still doubt my love?"

"I do not doubt it, Luke," she answered, pressing my hand.

"There is no little secret, then," I said, "remember that Sir George Harvey—you were engaged to him."

"Not strictly engaged, dear, and certainly not attached," she said, "I did not care—I had grown callous. But, when I met you in the Park, and at the ball, and you called here in my absence, some kind genius whispered

hope to me,—and when Sir George made his proposals, which, singularly enough happened the same day, I declined them at once, for I had no heart to give him.”

“Poor Harvey—I can feel for a disappointed rival.”

“I should never have married him, perhaps, Luke,” she said, musingly, “I do not think I should ever have married, if the truant had not returned.”

The smiles were once more on her lip, and beaming from her eyes, and we were lovers, and had forgotten our true lovers’ quarrel. Those were happy days that followed, looking forward to our marriage, and the Altar and the Priest came more prominently to view, as hand in hand we advanced along our road in life. I thought no more of Celia, or rather if I thought of her, it was as some fair girl that I had known and esteemed, in other days; the rapid current of events allowed me no other retrospection, suffered no truer analysis, or deeper gauge.

Every day endeared me more to Ernestine. Her great unselfishness, her study of my lightest wish, her passionate devotion for my

unworthiness, even that proof of her jealous disposition, and irritable temperament which I have chronicled, were all some tokens of the inestimable treasure I had won unto myself.

She had written to Mr. Dartford, and had received a cold, formal reply in return, expressive of his disinclination to make one in the wedding-festivities proposed. My father's Will had naturally worked a considerable change in Mr. Dartford's opinion of myself, and he looked upon the match as a bad one for Ernestine, although once upon a time, I could not have found a more faithful brother-in-law, in the wide world. But Mr. Dartford's opposition, did not affect me, or my betrothed, and we formed our plans, and laid out our lives, as if there were no Ruling Hand to thwart us.

One striking proof of her faith in me, was to give up all claim and title over her large property, despite my earnest persuasions to turn aside her resolution.

"Will it not appear, as if I sought to marry you, but for the money to be gained by the alliance?"

"Do I not know better?" she asked, affectionately.

"But, Ernestine—forgive me if I broach a painful subject."

She changed colour, but prepared herself to listen.

"This fortune was not left you by Mr. Morton, your first husband?"

"No, it was left me by an aunt of mine, ere I was twelve years old, and my guardians and executors insisted upon its being made over to me, and excluding Mr. Morton from all participation in and power over it. Perhaps, for this reason our marriage was an unhappy one."

"Unhappy with you, Ernestine?"

"Ah! rash believer in my power to charm," she said—"but it was so. A few weeks after my marriage heralded in the first storm, and all confidence was shipwrecked before I had been a wife six months. He was a villain."

An angry flush swept across her face, and her delicately-pencilled eyebrows contracted, as she proceeded—

"When I discovered his gross selfishness, and his eagerness to frame a hundred schemes to obtain possession of the money in my hands.—for he was a gamester and a profligate—

I maintained my power over my own wealth until his death."

"He died young?"

"Very young."

After an embarrassing silence, she said—

"It appears cruel to carry my enmity beyond the grave, but I cannot think of him without living the dreadful past over again, and experiencing sufferings and humiliations more than man can well imagine."

"God was merciful in removing the agent of such affliction."

"He died of consumption, in Sicily."

"You were not with him?"

"We had parted by mutual consent; his love and my girlish idolatry had turned to hatred—and seas were best between us. Oh! those bitter days!"

She shaded her eyes with her hand, and a few tears sprang upwards and dimmed their lustre. I changed the subject—and, speaking of our new life, and of the bliss in store for us, charmed her to believe that her sorrows had found an end for ever. On my return home, I found my brother Edward awaiting my return.

"Well, Luke, old fellow!"

"Well, Edward—I am glad to see you."

We shook hands, and took somewhat of a lengthened survey of each other. He seemed to have grown stouter since we had parted at 'The Rest,' and the features to have become more coarse.

"When did you arrive, Ned?"

"This morning—I dined with the Boyingtons and Agnes. Vaudon will not come to town—he sends his best wishes for your prosperity."

"Vaudon will not come—he has changed his mind, then?"

"Yes."

"Has he seen the rector since his return to Wharnby?"

"Why do you ask that question? Yes, he has seen him—and a pretty row they made of it, two evenings ago. I never saw little Silvernot in such a tremendous passion before—tremendous, Luke!"

"Vaudon! Vaudon!" I muttered, dwelling on his last act of duplicity—the last sign that his hatred still endured.

"That reminds me that I am the bearer of a letter from him."

“To me, Edward?”

“To you, of course.”

I took the letter from his hand, and, without opening it, tore it into a hundred strips, and strewed the pieces on the floor.

- “With Jacques Vaudon I have ended all communication. To know him, is but to heap misery upon all I do and act. When you see him again, tell him that thus I treated his lying words, and honoured them! And, Edward, be warned, and put no faith in the master of ‘The Rest.’ Judge for yourself—and rather take counsel from the first man you meet with on the highway, than of Vaudon.”

“Oh! you never agreed, and never will agree,” said my brother, yawning; “and, as for me, I judge for myself pretty well, Luke, I can tell you. I live at ‘The Rest,’ because it saves money; but I think London may suit me better.”

“Will you lodge with me?”

“No, thank you; I have accepted my aunt’s invitation, and shall be very comfortable there. When is *the* day?”

“Thursday morning next.”

My brother supped with me, and I walked

home to Park Lane with him, and listened to his dry details of Wharnby and his monied speculations in Wharnby's land and houses.

I did not enter the Boyington mansion with him. It was nearly one o'clock—the morning was too early, and the hour was too late.

I was in a musing mood. Edward's arrival from Wharnby had brought associations of that well-known place forcibly before me; and I walked slowly down Park Lane, seeing, in my imagination, 'The Rest' upon the cliffs, with its dark, waving trees topping the gaunt white rocks, and hanging over the deep green sea.

A woman, in a dark dress and thick veil, came hurrying down the street, and her rapid pace arrested my attention, and brought me back once more to the present. I stepped aside to let her pass, and something indistinct about the common dress she wore, or in her gait, her height, her figure, struck me so forcibly as corresponding with my sister, that I cried out, wildly, "Agnes!"

The woman hurried by, paying no heed to my interjection; and, for a moment, I stood transfixed, watching the receding form. As it neared my aunt's residence, I held my

breath with a frightful suspense, and kept one glaring look upon its progress. Once, I fancied it gave a hurried glance over the shoulder, and then increased its pace. It reached my aunt's house—it passed, and then ran on more swiftly, and was soon lost in the darkness.

“What folly,” I muttered to myself, as I resumed my walk, “to cry out my sister's name! Probably, it was some poor woman on a sad mission, and I must needs startle her with my vociferations. My sister—alone, and at such an hour, and equipped like that—I am becoming childish!”

The absurdity of the suspicion re-assured me, and I strode homewards, smiling at my own excited imagination.

CHAPTER VII.

MARRIED!

It has come! The appointed day—my marriage-day, and carriages are thick within the Square, and wedding-bells are pealing out; and Ernestine, surrounded by her bridesmaids, and in her beauty eclipsing all around her, is ready to set forth.

It has come! Within St. George's—most fashionable of London saints!—I wait her coming with a beating heart—a heart full of love and fevered expectation. I think not of Celia Silvernot, lost by my own rashness, and cast aside by my own impetuosity—of Celia, so unhappy in her loves; I think not that that fair virtuous girl might have come on some such sunny morning into the echoing

church, and, resting her hand in mine, have said, "I, Celia, take thee, Luke, to my wedded husband!"

No more such dreams for me!—no more such thoughts, so vain, and impotent, and self-accusing! Do I not await a more accomplished bride, as beautiful, more talented, and more devoted to me? What have I lost?

My friends are round me; my brother and sister, my aunt and cousin, Sir John and Mr. George, and a host of faces that I have seen before—friends of the Boyingtons and Agnes.

The clergymen—there are two—enter the communion, and at the same time, as though by some signal preconcerted, the doors swing wide, and Ernestine advances; and I, impatient bridegroom, haste to meet her, and take her from her surrounding friends, and move with her to the altar.

With the rich lace veil sweeping from her head, and falling over her in gauzy folds, she looks a bride well worthy of a monarch. Her step is firm, the hand upon my arm moves not tremulously; there is no hesitation, no backward lingering of soul.

I murmur forth her name, and press the

hand linked to my arm,—and she replies, “Dear Luke.”

Her face is very pale and white when she flings back her veil, and more than one behind me note the same, and whisper concerning it.

“The excitement has been almost too much for my Ernestine,” I say to her, “and the blush roses, for the time, have vanished from her cheek.”

“Am I so pale?”

“You have not your usual colour,” I reply; “but you are not fearful, at the last, and before this altar, dear?”

We are standing round it now, and the clergyman has opened his great book of prayer, and an officious individual is hovering at the back to prompt and give advice.

“Fearful of you!”—she presses my arm gently with her fingers, and looks up and smiles.

The weak tones of the minister’s voice rouse all to attention, and Lady Boyington, who is interested in the ceremony, hooks one finger into the button-hole of Sir John’s coat, and cowers him with a look. Sir John is restless, and had been better in Park Lane. He keeps

standing on tip-toe, and straining to peer over all heads in the direction of the church-door, and is continually asking, in husky tones, of Lady Boyington and cousin Jane—"Where's Twidger—where the devil's Twidger?" My brother Edward is alarmed at the baronet, and edges from him at all opportunities; and Agnes is more attentive to a flirtation with a Captain Evbell, than to Sir John's eccentricities, or her brother's marriage.

The assistant clergyman—we are great people, and play a well-known farce—commences, after the preliminary discourse, with his impressive exhortation. His voice is deep and almost sepulchral, and, in contrast to his fellow minister's, strikes deeper into the heart, and rouses all to listen. He is a young man to whom such ceremonies as our own are not yet hackneyed and grown flat, and, standing before Ernestine and me, he says, forcibly and impressively, with his looks fixed on us, as Beckett or Wolsey might have looked upon some penitent before them—"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of

you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow, are not joined together by God; neither is their matrimony lawful."

Ernestine's gaze is fixed upon the ground, but her colour has not yet returned, and she is, if possible, paler than before. The marriage rites proceed, and our hands are clasped together, and I place the ring upon her finger, and it is said—

"Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

We are man and wife, and what tie can sunder two such faithful hearts as stand before God's altar, and plight their troth unto each other?

The ceremony is complete, the names are signed, the death-like pallor has been replaced by the scarlet blush, the friends are thronging round us, heaping congratulation on congratulation, and Sir John is shaking me violently by the hand.

It is with some difficulty that I get my

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hand away from Sir John, who holds on as to a raft, and turn to Ernestine, and lead her from the church.

The wedding breakfast is to be given at my aunt's, and to Park Lane, carriage after carriage rattles fast away. Alone within the carriage, I draw her to my side, and ask if she is happy.

"Too happy!" she murmurs, with her head upon my breast; "I cannot think such joy can last—such deep bliss must be ever transient!"

"No, my dear Ernestine, do not say that," I reply, "whilst two hearts are knit together, having but one kindred feeling, one impulse, and beating with one sacred love, no storms from the outward world can separate them, or make a fleeting vision of their wrapt devotion."

"Dear Luke, I am not worthy of such love as yours."

"Dear Ernestine, your love is priceless."

"Not worthy, Luke, not worthy!" she reiterates,—“Oh! dear husband, promise never to fall off in this affection you have confessed to-day—to turn aside from me, and from

my love, as one hath done before. Cease to love me, and I cease to live !”

“May I cease to live myself, when I play so false and recreant a part !”

Is there no foreshadowing of the Future, in these suspicions of my bride,—no glimpse of an *Afterwards*, over which there is no controlling, and against which there is no preparing ? Ring on, wedding-bells, ring on—for there is harmony for me in these voices of the Lares, and the world is a gay world, and all the sombre repinings of my life, are gone with the gentle figure of my wife, nestling to my side,—my wife that has come from out the depth of my despair, like a bright angel from the Shadow Land, and sat beside me, and charmed away all evil !

It is a day of gladness—of feasting, and of revelry. There is the reflex of our joy, on every face around us, on every lip that drinks to our prosperity in the sparkling wine. Mr. Boyington, is a constant hanger-on to Agnes, and not a word in coy aside, to rival swains does she attempt to utter, but what he thrusts in his drawling voice, and mars all meaning responses with his officiousness. Sir John, is

missing, and Twidger has been seen to flit up stairs, and keep him company in his own private room. Ernestine, has little to say, she she is thoughtful, blushing, happy, and Edward has grown conversational with cousin Jane, and is telling her of his last investment.

At an early hour our post-carriage stands before the house, waiting to bear us from the guests and the dwelling of the Boyingtons, and Ernestine has retired to change her wedding-dress, followed by the ladies.

The time hastens on, and we are going away. With Agnes, Edward, Jane and my aunt, we take a more affectionate farewell, and as I press Agnes to my heart, so young, and beautiful and vain—a cold shudder creeps through every vein within me.

“When we meet once more, dear Aggy,” I say; “a year or even more will have passed by—it is a long time, judging by our glances into futurity, and we can but wonder what relative position we shall occupy ere the curtain rises again upon our reunion. How shall I find my sister?”

“Do not ask.”

“Not ask!”

"It is impossible to give an answer, is it not?" she said; "and does it matter much to you or me, seeing we have no power to avert it. I shall not be the reigning beauty then.—There will be fairer blossoms bursting into the full flower of their charms."

"And you?"


"And I, Luke, may be like flowers that have bloomed too long in the sun—a withered leaf at best! You see," she said returning to her light manner suddenly; "I can be metaphorical and weave similes of flowers, as well as prosing brother mine."

She pressed my hand, and glided across to Ernestine, and kissed her.

"Good-bye, dear sister," said my bride; "keep me a list of your conquests, that I may read them on my return, or send them to me in your first long letter."

"The postage would be heavy, Ernestine."

Lady Boyington folds me to her like a wrapper, and blesses me and slips a diamond ring upon my finger as a parting gift. Cousin Jane murmurs her best wishes, and offers me her gentle lips, and Edward, bluffly says: "Good-bye," and clasps my hand tightly,



but there is no fraternal warmth in the hard grip he gives me.

We are off. The windows of the room we have quitted are alive with smiling faces, and more than a dozen handkerchiefs wave in friendly farewell to us.

The liveried menials flock from the open door, and stare after our carriage, and a window opens from an upstairs room, and Sir John's red face and half his short figure ornamented about the shoulders with two great hands for epaulettes—the property of Twidger—leans out. Sir John, mindful of old customs, flings a heavy shoe into the road, and seems in the excitement of the moment, to be struggling with Twidger in a wild attempt to follow it—the crowd of idlers set up a cheer—the post-boys whip their horses, and we have started on our honeymoon!

* * * *

From the dark night of the city on the mountain side, from tower, and pinnacle, from spire, and mass of house roof, from sound of marriage bell, and hum of human voice, the Figure slowly takes its way, and I, bound to its will and helpless in mine own, follow it. To

me it seems as if, now, in my new life, a second figure and that a woman's should have been with me hand in hand, participating in this mysterious journey ; but still I am alone, and still the figure beckons and points to the downward path, and goes on before a silent death-like guide.

Past cities, that look like foreign capitals, with bold cathedrals looming from the haze in the grand, dark outline of their majesty—past flowing rivers, bright with light, as if the sun were rising, and on which falls the shadow of the purple clustering vines—and then the Figure, for the first time as it were, vanishes, and day breaks on the mountain-side, and my wife comes to me with her gladsome smile, and all is fairy-land.

The night comes on again—the light was but a gleaming meteor, although it may be counted by days and weeks of mortal computation—and the Figure stands as before, and waits for my approach ; and I look round for my second self, and she is gone ! We halt at a villa, near some glassy lake—for I can see lights from windows reflected in the dark sheet of water spreading out before it—

and my conductor makes a gesture of attention. My heart leaps with strange exhilaration, and even the presence of the spectre is forgotten in a wailing infant's cry! I move—but the Figure warns me back; and, as I have seen it once before, covers its grim, corpse-like face with the black folds of its garment.

I watch until he re assumes the old, stern attitude, and once more motions me to follow.

Past the silent lake—down into the gloomy wilds—more towns, lakes, nigh unto a sea—and then once more, the City from whence our last journey dated—from whence the marriage bells pealed forth—from whence we rode away a bride and bridegroom of an hour.

“Again!”

The Figure nods its head, and still precedes me. The gates of the city fly back as before; there are faces in the streets that I have longed to see for years—and faces missing that I last left full of health—and faces changed and marked by sin and care—and faces on which disgrace is masked by forced smiles that have no merriment within them—and faces coming from far and near, from life and the grave—all pressing forward and awaiting me!

BOOK VII.



CHAPTER I.

THE MOTHER'S LEGACY!

Two years have glided by in the current of my life—have passed as years of contentment do pass to the contented ones—swiftly, magically, evanescently. They were two such happy years, spent far away from the cliffs of Albion—far away from those recollections which had bitterness in them for us both.

Years spent in the South of France—by the banks of the Rhine—in the romantic Fatherland—in Switzerland, beneath its mountains, and by its glassy lakes—in Italy, ‘the sunny land’ of Europe—in Venice, gay, brilliant Venice—in islands studding calm blue seas—oh, those halcyon years! We shunned the cities—there was too much noise—too much

of the world for us within their bustling streets: we sought the shadow of the vine—the banks of the silent water—the foot of the mountain crag—the villa on the shores of the silvery lake! We followed no paths struck out for tourists—we abided by our own counsel—we sought but each other's approbation—and love made every resting-place a paradise. And in that villa by the lake—the villa we had engaged for six entire months it was so fairy-like a palace—what a hallowed home did it become to both of us!

For, therein was born unto me a son. I folded it to my heart, and invoked God's blessing on its baby head, and thanked him for this gift. I felt a better man—a greater Christian—for the boon bestowed; and when Ernestine could take my arm again, and wander by those shores lining the great silvery expanse, I was beyond all care—my bliss beyond all earthly knowledge.

So two years faded away, and in the summer-time we came back again to London, bearing our cherished boy. We had returned for no particular reason—it was not that we were surfeited with life far from our ancient world, or

longed for the attractions that that world presented—not that we sought to meet other faces, or that our love had become toned down to a less romantic passion. Our love was ever a romance! Yet, we came home, and took up our residence in the house in Cavendish Square.

We had heard but little of those left behind, two years ago; some letters had been received; others, in consequence of our constant change of place, had miscarried, and been lost; and we, ourselves, had been far from regular correspondents.

It was early in one evening of July, that we arrived at Cavendish Square. Being desirous of seeing my sister and my relatives, and of surprising them by my sudden return, I sallied forth at about nine in the evening, leaving Ernestine watching the slumbers of little Luke.

“It is a bad omen when the husband abandons his wife at so early a date, Luke!” she said, laughingly.

“Shall I stay?”

“No; go and persuade them all to come and see me to-morrow, and bring me all the news, Luke—every scrap.”

My carriage drew up at the house in Park Lane at about half-past nine. The house seemed full of guests ; there were lights behind every window blind, and shadows of many visitors passed to and fro.

The porter admitted me, and stared vacantly in my face.

"Tell Lady Boyington that ——"

"Lady Boyington!" he ejaculated with surprise.

"Have they gone from home?" I cried.
"Where are Sir John and Lady Boyington? My name is Elmore. Have you forgotten me, Pilchers?"

"Ask your pardon, Mr. Elmore, but I really had. Glad to see you back again, sir. Thankee, sir."

As he pocketed my *douceur*, I made further enquiries.

"Lord, sir! Lady Boyington and daughter have left Park Lane these nine months. You see, after the death of Sir John ——"

"The death of Sir John!"

"Why, didn't you know *that*?"

"I have but just returned — Sir John dead!"

"He cut his throat, sir—he did it all of a sudden, when Twidger's—dare say you remember Twidger, sir?—back was turned. Twidger tried to get the razor away—too late for anything but the tops of his own fingers."

"Can you give me Lady Boyington's address?"

"Yes, sir,—but will you not see Sir George?"

"Sir George!" I said. "Then, Sir George still lives here?"

"Of course, sir."

"You have a party to-night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lady Boyington is here, then, and Miss B. and my sister?"

"Lor, no, sir."

The man's manner puzzled me, but, having held already too long an altercation with him, I resolved to wait further explanations from the lips of Sir George himself.

There were a great number of servants darting to and fro, and, at a sign from the porter, one important member of the household ushered me up the well-known stairs into

that room from whence I had taken farewell of my sister and relatives, on the day I started on my wedding tour, and left me to wait the new baronet's pleasure, and to communicate my name to him.

After a quarter of an hour had passed, Sir George Boyington, with his thumbs in the pocket of his white vest, sauntered in, and, nodding carelessly—as though he had seen me yesterday—crossed the room, and, leaning against the mantle-shelf, drawled out—

Well, Elmore !”

“I am sorry to trespass upon your time, Sir George, more especially on such a night as this, but I am desirous of Lady Boyington's address,” I said, stiffly.

“She has apartments in Sloane Street, Chelsea—No. ——”

“I thank you.”

I made a hasty movement to the door ; I had had enough of Sir George Boyington. He had evidently no desire to continue my acquaintance—there was no more to be gained in my quarter, or to be got by my influence.

“Have you had a ple—a—sant trip, Elmore ?”

"Very," I replied curtly.

"Mrs. Elmore is well, I hope?" swinging an eye-glass I well remembered in his fingers.

"Very well."

"Pray pre-sent my res-pects."

I bowed, and Sir George rang for a servant to attend me. Biting my lip with suppressed rage, I went down the stairs and out of the house with a curse on the haughtiness of its possessor. I was soon driven to the house in Sloane Street, Chelsea, and a minute more saw me in the presence of Lady Boyington and her daughter Jane, who were occupying somewhat handsome apartments on the first-floor.

They were both in deep mourning, and looked pale. Lady Boyington was a trifle thinner, and my cousin was not altered for the better in general appearance—there was a sharp, angular look, about the face of both, indicative of mental harass and incertitude.

Lady Boyington began to moan as she embraced me.

"Oh! my dear nephew—my dear nephew! what a change since I saw you last!—what affliction and distress!"

I gave a wandering look round in search of Agnes, and replied—

“I regret it, and am sincerely grieved,” I said, then turning to my cousin. “Well, Jane!”

With a sorrowful, almost compassionate look, she advanced and saluted me. Lady Boyington was full of her own sorrows, and, after spreading out her handkerchief across her knees, ready for any emergency or sudden weakness, she broke forth with—

“Oh! poor dear Sir John, my husband—my dear husband! You have heard of his untimely end!”

“I have, aunt; let me not add to your distress by listening to its recapitulation,” I said, “I am surprised to see you in Sloane Street!”

“Oh! that unnatural son!—that cruel young man!—that wicked, ungrateful boy!” sobbed my aunt; “see to what we are reduced!”

“Reduced, Lady Boyington!”

“Sir John died without a will, and his son has ground us down to the last penny law allows, and turned us out of Park Lane, and

given us the worst carriage and the ugliest horses, and shut his doors against us, and never comes to see us—oh! dear me, dear me!”

“These are but minor troubles, mamma,” said Jane.

“You do not feel them as you ought to do—you do not feel them as you ought to do!” she cried reproachfully.

No mention of Agnes’s name—nay, even a studious avoidance of it, as if they were fearful of paining me, her brother, by its utterance.

“And my cousin Jack?” I said to Jane.

“Oh! my dear brother has had further promotion, and writes home in the gayest of spirits. That is a consolation—is it not, mamma?”

“Oh! dear me!” sighed Lady Boyington.

“But you tell me nothing of my sister Agnes,” I said anxiously. “Where is Agnes? Is she married, or ——?”

I stopped short in my inquiries; Lady Boyington’s face expressed astonishment and dismay, and Jane’s eyes were filled with tears.

“What has happened? Why do you look at me so strangely?”

I glanced from one to the other hastily and inquiringly.

"My dear boy," cried Lady Boyington, "you never got my letter—you have never heard?"

"I have heard nothing!"

"She has left us—she has gone from our protection—more than ten months. Oh! when shall our family be ever quit of the stigma of disgrace?"

It was some minutes before I could speak, or recover from a stunning sensation, as though I had received a heavy blow.

"Tell me all," I gasped out.

Kind cousin Jane, who thought the shock I was about to receive could be more gently dealt by her own lips, and had more faith in her powers of explanation than in those of her more worldly mother's, said—

"It is a great sin and error into which my cousin, Agnes, has fallen, Luke, and which we all regret for your sake as much as for her own. Dazzled by a great temptation, weak in her own resolution, she has given way and forgotten her ownself!"

I started from the chair I had taken near my aunt, and paced the room with rapid strides.

‘Forgotten her own self!’ The words were ringing in my ears, and branding on my brain this fresh disgrace—this family’s dishonour. My face was scarlet, as though I had inherited her shame, and had pandered to it by my long absence and continued silence in the stranger’s land.

“Some one speak!” I cried at last in a hoarse tone; “tell me more—how it happened—with whom she has fled—what were her motives? she who could have commanded an honest, lofty position, and yet chose degradation! It is fatality—it is God’s curse upon us. There is no chance in all this—there cannot be. It was fore-ordained!”

“No, no, Luke,” cried Jane; “not the blame upon your Maker—not the worldling’s ready subterfuge and vain excuse!”

“Go on—go on.”

Lady Boyington, tired of being so long silent, broke in with heavy sighs—

“Jane, let me speak. You are so young, and it is, I think, unmaidenly in you—at least it may be. Luke, my dear nephew, Agnes left us some time after your marriage—about a year afterwards, I think—and

took up her residence in Darton House, and became the mistress of the Duke of——”

“Where is she now?” I cried fiercely.

“Still with him.”

I snatched my hat from the table, and extended my hand.

“You will hear from me soon; I must go now—good-bye.”

“Luke, be not rash. What do you intend doing?” cried Jane.

“I will see her.”

“It is impossible.”

“I will see her,” said I, firmly, “it is my right—a duty delegated to me by my God,—a duty speaking from the grave of that father, who loved her so, and whose fears that her mother’s fate, and his own disgrace would have no warning for her, and would teach no lesson, have proved no visionary errors—I will see her!”

Lady Boyington shook her head.

“Good-bye—I shall see you to-morrow, or the next day—I am going now to Darton House.”

Making my hurried adieux, I hastened from Sloane Street, and was whirled in my car-

riage within a hundred yards of the Duke's mansion—I leaped out.

“You can go home, James,” said I, to the coachman,—“I shall not require you again—give that to your mistress, on your return.”

He took the hasty note I had scrawled on a leaf of my pocket-book, to Ernestine—stating that strange circumstances, which would be explained when I saw her, compelled me to delay my return home—touched his hat and drove away.

Another moment, and I was before Darton House. It was more of a palace than a mansion, and there was a broad gravelled space, hemmed in by lofty iron railings, before the stately residence. The gates were closed, and the house was dark in its exterior, save where two lamps shed a radiance on the great entrance-doors. All was still and silent.

After some deliberation, I walked swiftly along by the side walls, and numerous offices, and went round to the back. There was more life going on in the street, upon which the back of the house opened, and servants in red livery were passing swiftly in and out, whilst one or two idlers loitered near the doors, and looked about them, open-mouthed.

Watching my opportunity, I intercepted one of the servants, as he came from the house, and crossed the pavement to his horse.

"Is the Duke within?" I asked, slipping a gold coin into his hand.

"No, but he will be home to-night, sir," he answered, touched to civility by the golden bribe.

"And—Miss Elmore?"

The man elevated his eyebrows, rounded his mouth and stared at me.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"Miss Elmore is with him, sir."

He had mounted his horse by this time, and after another lengthened stare of great perplexity, he rode away.

I retraced my steps to the front of the house, and took up my post a few yards distant from it. I had formed no settled purpose, save to see her by some means, to risk anything to see and speak with her.

Hour after hour passed—it was near midnight—the streets were deserted. I seemed alone on the watch. Presently the entrance-doors were opened, and two men, in a kind of undress uniform, came out, walked across the

gravelled drive, and after opening the large scrolled gates of iron, returned into the house.

They would be here shortly—every roll of the carriage wheels in the distance made my heart leap, and set it beating wildly, till the noise rumbled fainter and more faint.

The whirl of wheels once more—a rapidly advancing noise. I gazed into the darkness of the long road, and beheld two fiery lamps gleaming and coming on. The doors were again opened. I could distinguish the figures of several servants in the hall. They were coming!

I directed my whole attention to the advancing equipage. I stood close in line with its intended passage, so that, if the blind were up, and a light were within, I might see the confirmation of my more than fears.

It was a dark green travelling carriage, with no crest or sign of royalty upon its panels, and it whirled by and passed through the gates a blank.

Full of my project, unfearing and uncaring, I darted suddenly after the carriage—and, running by its side at my utmost speed, kept

up with it—through the gates, across the drive, before the house. The servants were too much engaged to note my dark figure standing by one of the bronzed lamps—and I kept my place, watching the lowering of the steps, and glaring at the opened carriage-door.

There was a sharp voice suddenly ringing through the night—a man was running across the fore-court, fearful of some attempted act of violence. But, ere his cry had roused the vigilance of the servants, the Duke had descended, and was handing Agnes out. Yes, Agnes—my own lost sister—so beautiful and so full of smiles for him in the splendour of her infancy! She was in full dress; and the diamonds—that fitting legacy!—were sparkling in her hair and on her neck, as they had shone out in her innocence; and she was full of pride—and the light, firm step with which she descended, showed no indications of an aching heart, or conscience tortured by remorse.

“Agnes!”

I started forward with the name upon my lips, and she gave a shriek, and clung to the

Duke's arm. Half a dozen hands were instantly upon me, dragging me back ; and the man, with royal blood within his veins, turned round and faced me with a bold, fierce look of supreme haughtiness.

"What man is this?"

"Agnes ! I must speak to you—I will !"

"Remove him !" cried the Duke, loftily.

As they moved into the house, and I was struggling with the servants, Agnes whispered a few words to her companion, and he halted on the door-step.

"Take him to the gates, and let him go."

Further resistance was unavailing—and I was led to the iron gates, and thrust forth like a beggar. I shook my clenched fist at the house, in my impotence of rage—and, after a long gaze at the closed doors, turned on my heel, and strode homewards, with a host of thoughts battling in my brain.

Ernestine, haggard with long watching, hastened to me as I entered.

"What has happened, dear Luke?" she asked eagerly ; "have our cares commenced so soon after our return to England?"

"The name of Elmore is doomed to dis-

grace," I said, gloomily, "and a sister's fall from honour has affixed a deeper stain upon it, and made it once more a mark for public scorn and common talk. It is well that her father died before such a night as this !"

CHAPTER II.

AMBITION'S END.

AND this was the end of all! The conclusion to a father's tender care, Miss Osborne's studious watch upon her ward, a youth spent in a dull house by the sea-side, a family's love and pride, all ended thus—all proved to be nugatory and of no avail. Were there no warning voices bidding her 'beware!'—no spirits whispering 'look back!'

Oh! fatal hour in which she braved her father's dying wish, and left him in his mournful solitude—left him for what!

Through the early hours of the morning I brooded upon the strange events, many so small and trifling in themselves, that brought about this evil, and before me flit

the Agnes of the past—a little girl—a child with golden hair and thoughtful look—a woman, young, and beautiful, and vain—a reigning belle of a great city, with crowds of worshippers around her—a sister capricious, wilful, determined, and yet loved.

Not in all her capriciousness, her wilfulness, her firm determinations bent upon wrong ends—not in her vanity, or in the dangerous attraction of her more than common beauty, did I think of this result.

Ernestine sat beside me at the breakfast-table, and was silent out of respect to my own fixed thoughts, which dwelt upon that one engrossing theme.

It was the more terrible to me because there was no backward step—no retrogression—not one hope. There was not a ray of light upon this worse than darkness—no hand could save her, no prayer avert the horror of her future life. I felt that she was lost to me for ever, that she was no longer my own sister, and that I was tied hand and foot, and had no power to aid her or avenge her.

Late in the morning a letter was brought

to me. The superscription was in her handwriting, and eagerly I broke the seal.

"I will be in Kensington Gardens at three o'clock this afternoon. I shall expect you *alone*.

"AGNES."

I passed the letter across to Ernestine, and resumed my old abandonment to thought. Ernestine read it, sighed, and returned it to me, saying—

"You will go?"

"Yes," I said, "I will go. Not for the good that I can do, or for any reason that I can urge, but to see her once again."

I waited impatiently for the hour stated in the letter by my sister, and set forth at last to the appointed place of rendezvous.

It was a bright afternoon, and there were many loiterers in the Gardens. Naturally imagining she would select one of the less frequented walks, I sought those most deserted and free from visitors. A figure like my sister, followed at some distance by a servant, almost immediately caught my eye, and I hastened towards it. It was she.

"Agnes, I am here."

She took my arm and we walked on the velvet grass, with the servant some paces in the rear. She was richly dressed and on her face was a more patrician look, a haughty disdainful expression that though detracting from all airs of gentleness, added to her peculiar style of beauty.

"You have come home, Luke."

"Yes," I answered, mournfully."

"You sought me out last night. For what good or with what intent?"

"With what intent, indeed!"

"If you have met me in these gardens to-day, to reproach me, let our meeting end here. Reproaches are useless and will not affect me."

"True."

"I have appointed this interview with the permission of His Royal Highness."

"He is aware that you have come hither to meet me?"

"He is."

"What have we met for? Why I have sought you out? What good to you or me can be derived from this appointment?"

"None."

"Agnes, are you happy?" I asked.

"I am resigned to the lot I have chosen for myself."

"Will you—it is my last request—fly from it? I, your brother, offer you a home—a refuge from this degradation."

"Folly, folly."

"Agnes," cried I, passionately; "it is more than folly, it is madness on your part, all this."

"No matter, now."

"Agnes, dear Agnes, if you will leave him even at this eleventh hour, I will shield you from the world—I will love you as no brother ever loved. We will go far away to another land—you, and I, and Ernestine, and my child, and God will bless you in the late hour of your repentance."

No entreaty softened one deep line upon her face—the eyes were cold and steely, the lip curled; the voice unfaltering and calm with which she answered me.

"I followed not this path unreflectingly—no other than a King's son could have made me choose it. How many ready with their

sneers and upturned eyes envy my position in their hearts !”

“ Envy you,” I cried ; “ and how many, vain-glorious girl, feel themselves like me, disgraced. Are you less guilty because a King’s son points to the downward gulf, and leads you to it ? Agnes, I know why I came hither to-day. It was with a last hope—a wavering feeble hope, that some remnants of a true woman lingered, and some self-respect, and that I might have moulded them to some less sinful end. I find now, that you seek to palliate your crime — a greater sin than all. Let us part here—I can do nothing but disown you !”

“ I proposed this interview, and it was seconded by His Highness, for no other purpose. We are divided now, for ever, and our meetings can bring but dissatisfaction to us both, so let us part—is it not best, Luke ?”

“ Yes—but Agnes, I have this wrong to avenge,” said I, gloomily.

“ That were an act of madness,” she said, hastily ; “ he is a Royal duke, and beyond all vengeance.”

“ Not the vengeance of his God.”

We strolled under the broad-spreading boughs of the great elms, for a few moments, in cold silence, and her gaze was ever directed straight before her, as though to some distant focus, from which she had no power to withdraw her eyes.

"Agnes—I can conjecture no reason for this wild line of action; my mind affords not one sufficient excuse for you—not one."

"My reasons will ever remain a mystery; they are buried within my own breast, and will die with me," she answered; "think, Luke, if you like, that it was a dazzling temptation, and that I preferred it to Paul Redwin's wife, or to Sir George Boyington's young bride—think what you will," she added, recklessly.

"And you will not come with me?" I urged, in last entreaty; "you are resolved?"

"I am."

"God forgive you, strange, wilful girl, then—I have no more to say."

Without looking me in the face, she laid her hand in mine, passively and coldly, withdrew it after an instant, murmured some indistinct parting words, and glided from me.

I stood watching her figure—tall and queenly—vanishing in the distance, and thinking of what an end to her spring days of youth was this, and what mystery—for, was it not mystery?—had actuated her in her terrible selection? If there were any—and sometimes I am tempted to believe in some vile plot, or hideous snare, in which her vanity, perhaps, helped to entrap herself—it has ever been a secret unconstrued, and so will remain to the last days of my life.

There was no more for me to do—I had acted up to my own principle of duty—I knew there was no other course to adopt that would reclaim, or bring evidence of an atoning spirit. It was beyond my grasp—I could but sit down nerveless and disarmed, and listen to what the world said of her, and of what my heart accused her, even in its pity. I could but pity her as she went further down the winding path of sin—no voice or hand of mine could urge, or bring her back.

In the first moments of my indignation, I wrote a challenge to the Royal villain, and received an answer from his secretary, formal, and yet scoffing. There was no meeting him

face to face—shut up in his carriage, or hemmed around by guards, or seated with his peers, in coronet and ermine—he was safe from man's vengeance, and above it, as poor Agnes had remarked; and so I left him to his God's!

CHAPTER III.

A WELCOME VISITOR.

ONE maxim of Jacques Vandon's I could profit by, for all my detestation of his character and estimation of his motives. When he had said to me, that night on which I had refused to see the rector of Wharnby—"Brood not on irreparable misfortune—'tis the wisdom of the slave," he had sown the seeds of counsel, from which, in this case, I had learned to profit: for there was a counterbalance to my sorrow and inward grief in my child and Ernestine; and in my love for them, and in the peace around my hearth, I could forget what a true child of her erring mother was Agnes Elmore.

I have said that we did not return to

London to engage in the pleasures it presented, and we were more happy together in our own quiet home than in the crowd of fashion around us, and so we lived for each other, and were content.

We saw the invitations from old acquaintances, that had come thickly rushing in at first, grow less, and fade out entirely; we formed our own little circle, we chose our few friends by estimation of more sterling qualities than make up the aggregate sum of presentable people; we limited our feasting and revelry to a chosen few, and made home the first consideration, and were repaid for it by peace.

Lady Boyington and my cousin Jane were frequent guests at our house; and though my aunt's sighs and groans were not conducive to general entertainment, yet we allowed for them in her losses, and listened to her harrowing tales of Sir John's death and his son's ingratitude with grave attention and respect.

From my brother Edward—who had returned to 'The Rest,' after mature deliberation over ways and means and probabilities of London turning out a fortune to him—I

occasionally received a few lines ; but they were all to one purpose, all set phrases, where common words of brotherly interest in me or mine were concerned, and he thought required—and full of small commissions for me, relative to his own interest, in one way or the other.

Of Vaudon I heard nothing, neither did I care to hear of him—our lives were separate and distinct.

The season was advancing to its conclusion, and the nights were growing longer. I was sitting alone in my favourite room—the room where I had told my love to Ernestine, and won her to myself,—and reading the work of one of those enviable beings—a great author ! Ernestine was busy in the nursery with little Luke, and my thoughts were left to their full occupation of one object.

I had in a great degree overcome the moody fits of reverie to which I had been subject from a child, and, in my marriage felicity, could forget the hours of gloom I had spent, or the misfortunes I had had ; but they had never been entirely eradicated, and occasionally an unnatural despondency would fall upon, and

creep over me, and tinge everything with its own shadowy colouring.

Some such depression fell upon me in my solitude, and I gazed vacantly on the carpet at my feet.

And yet that night of all nights should have been symbolical of something less than misery to me—for one of the last gleams of perfect happiness that my life presented, shot across the darkening waste that lay before me.

As I sat oppressed, as it were, by stupor, I was unconscious of the door opening slowly, softly, and some one standing in the doorway, gazing in upon me. The watcher, after standing some minutes, regarding me observantly, entered the room, closed the door as silently as he had opened it, and moved towards me. When close to my side, he laid his hand upon my shoulder, and in deep, though cheerful tones, said at the same moment—

“Brother Luke.”

“Gilbert!” I shouted, springing to my feet; “Gilbert, my own dear brother! Hold off a minute,” I cried, clutching him by both arms, and gazing earnestly into his frank,

manly face; "let me be sure I am not dreaming. It is you—it is you! At last!"

"At last," he answered, pressing me to his breast, as he would have done a child's, and looking on me with his dark eyes, dim and swimming. "I told you we should meet again. I knew it the morning of our parting, if God would spare us both a few years longer. Dear Luke, I do not think even *you* can guess the full amount of pleasure at my heart, that I feel in grasping these honest brotherly hands again."

He wrung them in his own, and standing facing each other, with our hands clasped in re-union, we looked upon the changes time had made for better or for worse, since we parted at 'The Rest.'

For the better in Gilbert Elmore. Although he was pale—he was ever pale—there was a bright look in the face indicative of perfect health and peace of mind; and his form was well knit and his chest broad and full. He had set his crutch aside to grasp my hands, and had evidently not so much need for its support as at Wharnby, for when he crossed to a chair, he but slightly limped

in his progress, and touched lightly on the arm I had tendered for his assistance.

"What a host of things we have to ask of each other—what recapitulations of things past! I know not where to begin, or what inquiry to first suggest," I said, when we were seated.

"Patience, Luke," said my brother; "first, there is your own story. And there is a Mrs. Elmore I am curious concerning."

"Let me summon her hither to participate in my joy and ——"

"A few moments," hastily cried Gilbert; "your story and my own would be tedious to Mrs. Elmore, and I would rather, without disrespect to my brother's wife, whom I long to see and claim relation with, listen to your tale of 'The Rest,' and my father, and ——" he paused a moment — "and Agnes, and your own marriage, alone."

"You know of Agnes's fate?"

"Yes," he said gloomily, "and have vainly tried to see her."

"And why have you been so long silent—so ——"

"Patience, Luke," he said, holding up his

finger,—“to your tale—I am all attention.”

Leaning forward with one arm upon my shoulder, he listened eagerly to those incidents of home, that had happened since he left it, that have been chronicled herein, the records of ‘The Rest.’

I told him of the changes that had gradually come upon our father’s house, after his departure—of the infatuation of our father for Vaudon, which increased, and never knew a diminution—of my aunt’s arrival at Wharnby, and the many sad events which her presence created and brought about—of the dawning of Agnes’ future miserable life, in the severance of her plighted faith to Redwin—in the defiance of all counsel, and of a loving father’s wish, and setting out to the city in which three out of four of that father’s children were now dwellers. I told him of the sire’s death, and spoke of the last words breathing his own name, and he listened with the big tears of manly sorrow glistening on his cheeks. I told him all—of my own engagement to Celia—of the change brought about by Mrs. Silvernot, and my own pride, and Vaudon’s silent

hate—of my marriage, of my position to affluence once more—of my wedded bliss—of my boy, my son.

I did not mention the name of Miss Osborne, for fear of paining him by a recurrence to it, and he asked not one word concerning her.

Two hours had passed in the relation of my narrative—the servant had brought lights, and passed out unheeded—and we still sat absorbed in reminiscence of home.

“I have been to Wharnby once, Luke,” he said, at the conclusion of my long story, “a few weeks after my father’s death—I heard of it even in London, for the world, I found, had not forgotten him—I paid one visit to his grave—it is the son’s last duty to a father to pay many of them, but at that time, necessity compelled my immediate return.”

“And you never came to ‘The Rest’ to solace me in my affliction?”

“In your excitement you might have wished to follow me, and to join your fortunes unto mine, and I should but have marred them—I waited my own time and I think, I have chosen for the best. And now, let me have the pleasure of seeing my new sister.”

"And your story?" I inquired.

"We will find a time for that—suppose you walk a little way home with me, and hear the hum-drum quiet existence I have passed, an existence with but little romance, and less interest—a life passed in fighting upwards, with 'Perseverance' for a constant watchword. Let me see my new sister, now, and also ere I leave you, let me take a peep at my chubby nephew, through the curtains of his cot—you will not refuse me?"

In a few minutes, Ernestine entered the room, and gracefully acknowledged the presence of the stranger.

"This is a very old friend of mine, Ernestine."

"He is doubly welcome then," extending her hand.

"A friend that I have often spoken to you concerning, dear," I said, proud of my little mystery.

"Spoken to me," said my wife, wonderingly.

"No less a friend than my dear brother, Gilbert."

"A brother that had some difficulty in obtaining an entrance without preliminary warn-

ing from the servants, Mrs. Elmore," said Gilbert; "some difficulty in startling him by an unexpected visit, claiming at the same time the right of relationship to you, fair sister mine."

There were fresh greetings after that, and we were all very happy and had all so much to say.

Gilbert was a brother to Ernestine in a quarter of an hour—his genial open way, his manly frankness, his great heart exemplified in his affection for me, so touching in its very minuteness and delicacy, charmed my bride to love him as a sister even in one meeting—and when before his departure he insisted on being escorted to the sleeping-room of our child which was close unto our own chamber, and in which nurses were ever kept on watch, the delight of that never-forgotten evening reached its culminating point.

Reached, but did not begin to die off at its apex.—It extended wide, and embraced everything around us. Ernestine's own hands drew aside the fairy drapery of curtain and held the waxen light, and we three stood and gazed upon the child in its deep innocent sleep,

with one tiny hand carelessly thrown over the coverlet. Gilbert stooped and kissed the baby almost reverently, and then stood up again and folded his hands upon his crutch, and looked long and wistfully at it.

"I will not say God bless your first-born, Luke, for there is sure sign in that infant peacefulness of God's blessing resting on its head—I will say God be ever with it! Mrs. Elmore, nay, if you will allow it, sister Ernestine," said he turning to my wife, with a gayer look; "my brother was a lucky fellow, when he was crossed in love at Wharnby."

"Does he think so?" she said glancing smilingly at me.

"I think I am far from envying any man in England," I replied.

Dreamers! dreamers all by the bedside of that sleeping child.

CHAPTER IV.

HOME-PEACE.

"MRS. ELMORE, I have formed a plan to rob you of your husband for a few hours," said Gilbert, upon our return to the parlour.

"He will be in good hands, and I can trust him," Ernestine replied.

"It is no less a plan than to take him home with me and show him my diminutive house in the suburbs, and tell him my simple story as we journey on."

"Will you not take the carriage?"

"Thank you, sister, but if Luke objects not, I would prefer the walk."

"And I."

When we were in the lighted streets, he linked his disengaged arm in mine, and we

walked, at a somewhat slow pace, in the direction of Paddington.

For some minutes he was silent.

"I am anxious for your narrative, Gilbert."

"You little think what a few words will tell my story when the one clue is given to the whole riddle, brother," he said; "the great secret is—I am an author."

"An author!"

"Not a famous one, Luke—not one whose name is heralded by pretentious announcement, or one that ever creeps into a dedicatory page, as mark of esteem or friendship from fellow writers—I am not a novelist. To write a work of fiction was the first dream of my ambition, as it has been of many aspirants for fame before me. Well, I wrote one; and, after months of hard labour, of toil—hard, unceasing mental toil—such as the careless readers and skimmers of books pay no consideration to—it had just sufficient talent in its composition to be received by a publisher—for nothing!"

"For nothing?"

"Ah! Luke—the world of books is a strange circle—a solar system, with one great

sun in the centre—a few planets here and there—and innumerable nameless stars, some of which start from the heaven, and are seen no more. The world of books to the amateur—to the unfledged authorling, who always dreams of eternal fame, of the top of the tree, not of its lower branches and boughs on which the *golden* fruit are so scarce and unripe—is the brightest of worlds, painted in colours the most brilliant and dazzling, while the fit lasts. There is no such temptation to the amateur as literary distinction; and yet there is no temptation that proves in the end so illusive and denying.”

“You vilify your own craft, Gilbert,” said I—“but your novel?”

“It had its day—it found a few kind reviews, one or two helping hands—it ran on an existence of some four months, was seen at circulating libraries and at marine bath-rooms, and then died a natural death. Publishers did not leap at me, or fight for me. I might have got, perhaps, thirty pounds for my second work’s labour, if I had *begged* hard.”

“But we read of writers receiving their thousands!”

"Suns in the solar system—there are few of them. For every amateur to build his hopes on such examples, is like every private soldier in the king's army to look forward to being a field-marshal—and, Luke, there is a greater chance for the soldier."

"But there *are* prizes amongst the blanks."

"There is the evil," said Gilbert ; "one man by influence—great influence allied to great talent (both must co-operate to one end)—achieves an European reputation ; and fifty thousand fools rush to their desk, with the vain hope of reaching to the same position—sacrificing time and valuable opportunities of other pursuits for the frail bubble that will burst before their eyes. But this is not my story."

"But you have succeeded?"

"Partly," continued he ; "after my novel had been published, and the reviews had estimated me at my just worth, and brought me down to my fair level, I turned to the old study of essays, sketches, biographies, works that had occupied my time at 'The Rest.' Well acquainted with modern literature, I

finally (for I will not harass you, Luke, with recounting all my rebuffs and disappointments) obtained the place of reviewer to a weekly newspaper, and this, added to chances now and then of furnishing dull articles on parliamentary topics and national grievances, is the life of Gilbert Elmore."

"I had hoped to have heard a fairer account of you, Gilbert," I said, mournfully; "I did not think such a struggle for daily bread compatible with the contented appearance you present."

"Was I not always contented, then, at home?" he asked.

"But the change from 'The Rest!'—from affluence to the monotonous existence of a poor writer."

"I bore it with philosophic calmness," he replied. "I hoped on and worked my way. The difficulties I encountered only nerved me to greater efforts at exertion. I thought not of sinking at the outposts, or giving up, faint-hearted, at the first barrier that crossed my path."

He then narrated to me the whole series of his attempts in literature, and his indomi-

table perseverance, month by month, and year by year, a narration tedious enough to the eyes that may dwell on these pages, but, ah! how precious to a brother who had lost him for so many years.

It was a pretty, tasteful little house, containing, probably, some five or six rooms, that we finally stood before, and to which he pointed as his home; but I could not look up at its diminutive proportions without sighing at the contrast it presented to my own mansion in the Square, and to our father's great house looking on the sea.

He read my thoughts, and said laughingly—

“You are dismayed at my lilliputian domicile, Luke! but it is a difference from my first lodgings, in the back streets near the Strand. I took this cottage with a very light heart, and have been happy in it with my housekeeper.

“Your housekeeper?”

“Ay!—the fairest, best of housekeepers!—you will like her at first sight.”

He rattled cheerily at the brass knocker and a spruce maid-servant answered to the

summons. We entered the front parlour, and a lady rose to meet us.

I started back with surprise, exclaiming—

“Miss Osborne!”

“Miss Osborne no longer, brother,” said Gilbert, as I warmly greeted her; “this lady is Mrs. Gilbert Elmore.”

No wonder Gilbert was contented and happy now, or that he entered his cottage home with a light heart, when that cheering, pretty face, was to be the comforter of his life, the spirit at his hearth.

“My congratulations come late,” I said, kissing the sister that had so suddenly started up before me; “but they are none the less sincere—none the less full of my best wishes for your welfare.”

“I am sure of that, dear brother,” said she in reply, as I recovered my first surprise.

“And now,” said I, when we were seated, “there is a story to complete, deceitful Gilbert. How has this chain of fortunate events ended in accordance with the dearest hopes of your life? I did not think, Mrs. Elmore, when we took leave of each other at ‘The

Rest, that I should welcome you as my brother's wife, when we met once more."

"I did not think so myself, Luke."

"Now, Gilbert, the story—I am all impatience"

"When I obtained the reviewership to the weekly paper I have alluded to, I was thrown more into the society of literary men, and occasionally received invitations to *réunions* from some brother or sister of the order.—I met with Miss Osborne one evening, at the house of our greatest living writer. It was a great surprise for both of us, for we had been in ignorance all our lives of the kindred pursuits we had followed."

"You are an authoress!" I exclaimed, turning to Mrs. Gilbert Elmore.

"I have been a small one all my life."

"Even at 'The Rest?'"

"Yes," she replied; "did I not regularly pay visits to Cliverton once a week? I was writing a serial tale for a journal at that time; and, upon our first meeting at Cliverton, you saw me coming from the office of a gentleman with whom I was commissioned, by my publisher, to transact all business that related to my poor profession."

"Might I inquire if you had any particular reasons for the retaining this secret so long from us?"

"My works were never popular, and I was almost ashamed of the weakness of my own productions," she said modestly; "but writing was my chief consolation for long weary hours, and I followed it for the love of an old habit."

"But the secret was discovered at last?" I said.

"Yes," she replied, "and I was in a manner compelled to mix more with society; but it was society in which I could take an interest, and feel at home with—and so I bring my confessions round to Gilbert's story, for the interruption of which I hope to be forgiven."

"Forgiveness granted," said Gilbert; and continued—"It was an embarrassing meeting; for it reminded us of the last conversation we had had together—you remember, Luke?"

"Well," I replied, "you were a disconsolate lover, then, Gilbert, and were seriously thinking of dying of a broken heart."

"Rail on, brother," he said; "you have been more love-lorn than ever I have; but this narrative will never come to an end."

When I was a rich man, or when hope held out to me the prospect of being one, this variable little lady could not murmur one word of encouragement; but when I was a poor scribe, who worked late into the night for a pittance, I once should have scorned as derogatory on my part to accept, when I was one grade above actual poverty, I began to hope I might some day claim her for a bride. Nay, more—I discovered that it was not for want of love my first rejection at her hands brought me to despair. I found that out in its good time, when I learnt to love her more dearly than before—when I sought her hand a second time, and,” proudly resting his hand on her shoulder, “won her for a wife.”

“Is he not enough to make me vain, Luke?” said she, smiling.

“If he makes you happy, it is his duty, and what you deserve,” I answered, “and, looking on you both, I do not augur much infelicity from the prospect set before me.”

“We are contented, and so no misfortune can weigh heavily upon us,” said Gilbert. “We married for love, and so, in this humble

sphere, we jog on methodically enough, but still, surely. By our united exertions we do not save much money; but we are free of the world's care, and have no envy for our neighbours."

"But you are enviable beings in yourselves," I said; "and the cares of a past life are forgotten in the present."

I stayed with them till a late hour, and listened to full recitals of the many struggles in their literary avocation they had gone through, and the waves of distrust and jealousy they had breasted, fighting always for one haven.

And they had found it. In the new life for them both, blest in the affection of the heart, they had found the only 'Rest' on earth!

It was striking one when I entered Cavendish Square. A slight drizzling rain had begun to descend, and my few remaining steps were made sharply in the direction of my home.

A man, with a cigar in his mouth, was walking up and down before my house, and gazing curiously at its many windows. As I came up he advanced towards me.

"Whose house is this?" he asked, peremptorily.

"Mine, sir," I replied, laconically.

"Indeed!" he said, puffing at his cigar; "perhaps you can favour me by the information as to the locality of Mrs. Morton's?"

"Mrs. Morton's!"

"Yes; do you know her residence?"

"I know there is no Mrs. Morton, sir," I answered, knocking at my door.

"Is she dead, then? I never heard of that. That's strange news, at all events!"

Muttering to himself, the man gave one more look at the house, and sauntered leisurely away, turning round from time to time, and looking back at me—his lighted cigar a red spot in the darkness,—until the door shut me from his sight.

CHAPTER V.

THE OPERA.

THE impression made upon me by the man I had seen watching the house in which I was a resident, faded not away, or became lost among those minor incidents which happen every day, and which live so short a time.

“Ernestine,” said I, at the close of the following day, in which I had vainly endeavoured to exclude the man from my thoughts, “I have forgotten to mention a chance meeting with a friend of yours.”

“Of mine, dear!” replied Ernestine; “who was he?”

“A gentleman, whom I met on the steps of this house about one in the morning, and who inquired after you by the name of Mrs. Morton.”

"Inquired for me by *that name*!" she cried, "who could he have been?"

"The very question that puzzles and perplexes me, dearest," I said, "and try how I will, the man is ever before my eyes."

"What sort of man was he?"

"A man of about my own height, with very sallow and sharply defined features, small dark eyes, and hair of considerable length, curling almost into ringlets, as I have seen a gipsy's."

"I do not know the man," she said, slowly.

"Not by one trait which I have represented?"

"Not by one. I can never have seen him. I *am sure* I have never seen him, Luke."

"It does not matter," I remarked; "only the lateness of the hour and the peculiarity of his questions, have more than a common effect upon my impressionable nature."

"Shall we ride over to your brother Gilbert's?" asked Ernestine, suddenly changing the topic of discourse; "you have promised me that visit."

"Willingly."

Ernestine was so long a time in her dressing-room, that after waiting above an hour, I

ascended the stairs in search of her. All was still within the room, and no answer being returned to my light tap on the panels of the door, I turned the handle and entered. She was praying!

“Ernestine, what is this!”

She started to her feet, and running towards me, flung her arms round my neck, and burying her head on my breast gave way to a passionate outburst of tears.

“Ernestine, you are unnerved—this is childish. Why do you cry thus, dear?”

“Oh! Luke, I am ——”

“You are what?”

She rested a white hand on each arm, and looked me long and anxiously in the face, so long, so anxiously, that I felt as if some horror were impending over me—as if her reason had received a temporary shock, or some alarming illness were about to strike her to the ground.

There seemed a struggle with her feelings, and then her natural look returned, and she murmured,—

“I am fearful of that man—suppose—suppose it were a plan to rob you, or this house, or that it is the beginning of some plot, which

we are at present ignorant concerning—some dreadful plot, that is to uproot our bliss of home!”

“And you have prayed for the averting of what dwells in your imagination alone, dear heart?” I said, “there, get on your bonnet—you have been too much in-doors, and a change will do you good.”

I went towards the door, and she called me back.

“What is it, Ernestine?”

“Nothing — nothing. No matter. But a repetition of this nervous folly. I have shaken it off now.—There!”

When we had entered the carriage, and had been driven from Cavendish Square, there were no appearances left of her recent agitation, and at my brother’s house, she was the gay, witty, fascinating woman I had ever known.

We divided into two sections, after a few minutes general conversation, and Gilbert and I left our wives to chat amongst themselves, and to become better acquainted with each other. Gilbert had that morning received a letter from Edward, to whom he had written

a few days since, apprizing him of his marriage, and his position in life, and this letter he passed to me with a grave face.

“There is Vaudon’s hand, and Vaudon’s counsel in this,” said he, “it is more cold and phlegmatic, than I had anticipated. He is glad to hear I am well, and regrets that business connected with some building shares at Cliverton and Wharnby, will compel him to decline seeing me in London for some time to come. Poor Edward—*In London* do you mark. He keeps me at arm’s length from ‘The Rest!’”

“More worldly and less brotherly, with every letter written by his hand,” I said, refolding the letter after its perusal,—“I have no doubt Jacques Vaudon’s advice was asked, before this epistle was concocted.”

“What influence this man has ever had—what a strange, mysterious, undermining life his has ever been!” said Gilbert, “do you know, Luke, he proposed to my wife before she left Wharnby?”

“Proposed!”

“Yes—he told her he had loved her from

the first few weeks she had gladdened 'The Rest' with her presence, he knelt at her feet, and implored him to accept her—this man of iron—this statue !”

“Then it was jealousy that engendered his vindictiveness towards you ?”

“Well, I can forgive my disappointed rival's jealousy, although not the means he used to attain the end he sought—even to the lowering of the object of his own love in the eyes of the patron and the master. His enmity towards me has but brought about the very conclusion he fought hard to turn aside : he has gained a few more thousand pounds ; and I a richer legacy — a faithful, loving wife !”

Such friendly meetings as this occurred twice and thrice a week, either at my own house or my brother's ; and the links of the family chain — those household ties between us that had been so long divided—were united more firmly together ; the weight of the care that had set so long upon me, concerning him and his destiny, was removed for ever from my mind. Then, I had his works to read, and the forgotten novel, and Miss Osborne's or

Mrs. Elmore's tales and her book of poems—and many were the hours they charmed me, and took me to ideal worlds and made me a dweller therein.

Ernestine and I became a little more fashionable, too; and, emerging from our hermitage, we took a greater part in the world. This was my own selection, and I did it for the sake of Ernestine, and with the desire of eradicating by constant change of scene the nervous demeanour she had of late assumed. I had cause to congratulate myself on this expedient—for, despite her reluctance to the revival of old associations, and her unwillingness to take part in festivities that once had charms for her, she became self-possessed, and more like the Mrs. Morton I had known at Cliverton, without the loss of one iota of her deep love for me—love which was expressed in so many thousand different ways—love which, by possession, knew no diminution—love which lasted all her life!

Our box at the opera was occupied more often by ourselves, and less by our friends; and, enshrined therein one evening at the end of the season, I saw from it another face that

had been long missing in everything but my memory.

By a peculiar coincidence, that very evening, there entered the box opposite to ours, Agnes and her royal protector. There was no effort made to avoid the glances shot from myriads of *lorgnettes*—no shrinking behind the costly curtains—no drawing them before her. They both sat immediately in front, and paid great attention to the stage—the duke, from time to time, condescending to survey the house through his ivory mounted opera-glass. I felt the tears of wounded pride swimming in my eyes—I felt what share of her shame I could not help participating in ; for all the sole blame she had brought upon herself. She sat there like a beautiful statue, her white, rounded arm on the cushion before her, rich flowers in her hair, and a blaze of gems upon her neck ; and beside her gleamed the star, glittering with a thousand hues, and scintillating with a thousand fires upon the black heart of its possessor.

She saw me, and her glance swerved quickly aside and never more turned in the direction of her brother.

Studiously avoiding a look towards my box, she kept her face averted, and fidgetted with the bouquet of flowers by her side, with one restless gloved hand.

The music—the glowing scene enacted on the stage—the melody ringing throughout the house from the favourite prima-donna of the season had no charms for me now, and I looked down into the crowded pit, and ground my teeth together with rage. — For they were talking of her—there were six—seven—eight groups — I counted them, beneath me — and some were pointing towards her and the opera-glasses were still turned upwards, and she sat there still calm and queenly, the pity of the virtuous, and the loud talk of the slanderous.

There were voices talking very high in the next box, and one, a woman, said :—

“To think the Duke has not even a common respect for his own class, but must offer us this fresh insult.”

“It is shameful and disgusting,” was the reply ; “but listen, you will much admire this trio.”

Everywhere signs of her disgrace — signs

which I hear by my side, which I see around me, in all parts of the house and which is uncared for by the occupants of the box before me, and of which no consciousness is shown.

Ernestine saw my agitation, and whispered—
“Shall we go?”

“No,” I answered, moodily; “if they can sit there in their infamy, we can remain here, knowing how little of their sinful inheritance descends to us. Let us not fly because Agnes Elmore’s name is on more than our lips to-night.”

Once again looking at the pit stalls, and my attention directed to some late comers who with more noise than the habitués of the opera consider becoming in its aristocratic precincts, were making their way to some vacant seats. I started and raised my glass. The three comers were Sir George Boyington, Lord Chilvers, and Paul Redwin.

Yes, Paul Redwin, with a bolder look upon his handsome face, a stamp upon it, that I had seen in many men’s, that was apparent in his companions, but that I had never wished to see, or dreamt of seeing in his own, and

usurping and destroying those finer attributes of soul which had shone out in his face. There was the old revived air of foppery about his dress, jewelled studs, meandering gold chain, embroidered vest, and cambric shirt front with enormous frill, then the reigning fashion amongst town beaux—white gloved hands, one of which as he leant carelessly on the back of his seat, served to support that curly head I knew so well. I felt a greater shock in seeing him there with these companions, than upon the entrance of my sister an hour before—I remembered the wild look in his dark eyes when he met me on the country road—the look of despair in his set-features, rigid with the great convulsion that had shattered his one ambition, that she, a few yards above his head, had caused, choosing the darker path that set her by the side of the man with the star upon his breast.

After some whispering with his companions, he turned away from them, and the smile changed suddenly to a look of utter weariness and he gazed languidly at the stage, his hand still supporting his head in the careless attitude he had at first assumed.

There was no keeping my eyes from Paul Redwin—he was a talisman, that drew my attention from all beside, and fixed it on himself. The more I surveyed him, the more pain I felt at his appearance—the reckless air that demonstrated itself even as he sat there listening, or feigning to listen, to the opera. Lord Chilvers, lolling back in his seat, and running his hands through his hair, gave a careless stare round the boxes, and catching the eye of their occupants here and there, nodded familiarly. He would probably have bestowed his further attention on myself, had not Boyington suddenly caught his arm and whispered some communication. Chilvers immediately looked up towards the Duke's box, and surveyed Agnes for several minutes. Presently he touched Paul Redwin's arm, without changing his own position. I sat and eagerly watched the effect upon my friend. So interested was I in all he did, that I leant forward in my box and held my breath with suspense. Paul looked up—looked full at Agnes Elmore—and I saw the colour leave his cheek, and the hand that had been buried in his hair, drop and

clutch nervously the arm of his friend in the surprise of the moment—then he resumed the old attitude of apathetic indifference, and, after a laughing word with Chilvers, looked again at the stage, but with a heavy, gloomy frown, darkening his face. Agnes saw him—saw the start and the feigned composure—and as I instinctively glanced across at her, I saw a quick red flush for a moment—for one poor moment—pass across her, like the shadow of a red hand, the last sign of the remembrance of the old love between them.

Paul and Agnes were both dwelling upon one theme, then—the music sounded meaningless, the prima donna was but a mummer.—They were living at Wharnby, and were engaged to be married!

To be married! Yes, erring sister, he might have been your husband, the sole comfort of your life, the protector of an honourable old age. Ye might both have been so happy—there was not one cloud to have darkened your lives, if ye had so willed it—not one dark spot on the sunny track you might have chosen. Is there no repentance now, Agnes Elmore?—not one sting of remorse, not one

pang of contrition beneath that gently-heaving bosom—not one woman's wish that you had loved him better in old time? Remember the evenings at 'The Rest,' when he came night after night, when in the young days of his courtship, (before Wharnby saw your aunt and cousins on its cliff,) you have run to greet him, open armed, as his tall form advanced towards his betrothed, and the fervour of his love shone out of his doting eyes. Remember the choice you have made—look down at him even now, wrecked, as part of his better nature is—look at the well-known face and figure, and contrast him with the bloated piece of grossness in whose veins the blood of royalty stagnates! She raised her bouquet, but whether to inhale its fragrance, or to hide a weakness strange to her, God knows; but something told me, for once, there was a tear lingering amongst the flowers in her hand, and that one regret beat at her heart, and stabbed her with past memory.

I pointed out Paul Redwin to my wife.

"You have heard me speak of him?"

"I saw him at the Cliverton Ball, but he was a very young man then. He was a great friend of yours, dear, was he not?"

"A very great friend, Ernestine," I replied ; "and do you see with whom he is associated now?"

"Yes."

"Yet, Paul Redwin is the very soul of honour, and with a heart gentle as a woman's. They are not men to appreciate such qualities in him, and he is one to hide them beneath affectations and mannerisms, when aware of their unfitness to the friends he has selected," I said. "Ernestine, I must save him."

"Save him!"

"From those men—from himself," I said, quickly. "His is a nature not to be blasted and corrupted; but, by strong and repeated efforts, and a word of mine, might turn him even yet. I will essay that word. It is the duty of a true friend. He might have been my brother once, and I feel a brother to him now."

"What can you do?"

"I can give him hope, and I will try it."

The opera was over—preparations for the ballet were going on behind the scenes—Agnes and the Duke of —— had retired, and

Ernestine, leaning on my arm, proceeded to the carriage.

"Will you mind going home alone, dear?" I said; "I am desirous of intercepting Redwin at the entrance."

"No, Luke," she replied; "but you will not be late."

I saw her safe within the carriage, and then entered the Opera by the pit entrance, and took my post at the back, keeping them in sight. The ballet was a lengthy one, but they stayed till the act-drop fell upon the last scene, and a general departure had commenced.

Occupying a position which they were compelled to pass, I waited for their coming. Their voices warned me of a near approach.

"I don't admire her dancing particularly, Chilvers."

"Oh! she is admirable. What do you say, Redwin?"

"She dances with much grace, it appears to me; but, then, I am no judge."

"Oh! I don't know that—I watched you narrowly, and you were absorbed in her *pas de* — What was it?"

"I really do not know."

"We will go behind the scenes on Saturday, eh?"

"If you like—anything you like."

"Spoken like a —— Hollo, Elmore!—this is a refreshing sight, by Jove. Glad to see you, man, and to congratulate you. Boyington, of course, you know this gentleman?"

Boyington and I bowed stiffly to each other.

"This is my particular friend, Mr. Redwin."

But Redwin had already recognised me, and had grasped me by the hand.

"I am glad to see you, Luke—this is an unexpected meeting; but the sight of an old friend does one's heart good."

"You are known to each other?" inquired Chilvers.

"We are old friends," answered Redwin.

"I heard of your marriage from Boyington, this very evening, Luke. Indeed, I but returned from Paris with Lord Chilvers this morning, or should have made my congratulations earlier."

"When are you going to Wharnby?"

We were in the lobbies leading to the doors that opened on the colonnade.

"Wharnby," he said, musingly—"oh! some day—not yet awhile."

"Will you turn in my direction, Paul?" I asked when we were in the street.

"That be hanged!" cried Chilvers,— "that be hanged for a shabby trick, Elmore—what! rob me of my friend? No, no!—if you have given up late hours, like a prudent Benedict that values his own ears, don't try to interfere with the time of the noble order of bachelors here assembled."

"Mr. Redwin can make good any breach of contract at another opportunity. Now, I am sure he will not refuse me so poor a favour. We are old friends, and have much to relate."

"Da—amon and Pythias," said Sir George, yawning.

"But, but—devil take it, man!" said Chilvers, "Mr. Redwin is going to sup with me to-night—I have his sacred promise."

"If you insist upon my compliance with that promise, I am your obedient servant, my lord," said Redwin, haughtily; "but, candidly, for this night, I give the preference to Mr. Elmore."

"Oh! If that's the case—so be it," said

Chilvers; "it's of no consequence, so far as I'm concerned. But you will come to-morrow?" he asked, eagerly.

"If no peculiar circumstances should prevent me, Chilvers."

"Good-night, then."

He turned away with Boyington.

"I am sorry, Paul, to see you with those men."

"Sorry! Elmore," said he, linking his arm within my own. "What matters the company I seek, if excitement and pleasure be my object?"

"Do you find much pleasure with them?"

"I find excitement," said he, heedlessly; "I see the world with them; I gamble a little—just enough to keep my nerves strung and in play. I must have plenty to do, now—I must be here, there, everywhere—opera, ball, concert, race-course—whirling along bravely. That's life, old friend!"

"Not the life suitable for Paul Redwin."

"We differ there, Luke," replied he.—"And, well, how prospers the Elmore of 'The Rest?'"

"Bravely."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Redwin," I asked, "how long have you known Lord Chilvers?"

"Oh! these nine months. He's a fine fellow, a trifle hasty, or so, and too impetuous even for me—but a fine fellow, as the world goes."

"Paul Redwin," said I, gravely, "may I speak of the past as to an old friend? May I set aside conventionalities, ceremonious forms, and speak as I would to a brother?"

"Speak on, Luke," he answered; "from you I can bear more than from any other man living."

"You left Wharnby with the intention of forgetting my sister Agnes," I said: "has the wound healed?"

"I do not know, Luke—truly, I do not know," he said. "I have tried to forget—I have plunged, as it were, into a host of things at once, and have buried my wrongs, if,"—laughing hollowly,—“I ever I had any. My estimate of woman is not so high as formerly, that is all."

"Judging the whole sex by one," I said, "shallow reasoner."

"I find them alike," he said, sternly.

"Those whom you have sought, perhaps so."

"My faith is shaken, Elmore, and will never be firm more."

"You saw *her* to-night."

"Yes," he said, sorrowfully, "and I would have rather seen her in her coffin. Luke, I found I had not forgotten her—for to-night I could have covered my face with my hands, and cried like a child. To see her thus—to see her thus, good God!"

"Paul, will you return to Wharnby?"

"No."

"Paul, will you throw aside these false friends, these heartless companions, and begin to think again for yourself, and to obey the promptings of your own impulse?"

"No, Elmore."

"Think of the mother, of your own parent, poor, old, doting lady, who would die of grief if she heard you now; think of her in her loneliness—think how she loves you, Redwin!"

His lip quivered at this adjuration.

"Elmore, I thank you for this interest in

me," he said, after a long silence, during which we had been walking rapidly, "and I value the noble heart that suggests the counsel, but to follow it is now impossible! What am I to go back for? To feel every pang again, that well-remembered scenes will recall to me—to live without an object in the great waste, with the mocking sea rolling its dreary waves to the arid sands—to be with a tortured heart in the seclusion of my own home! It would be maddening. Oh! Luke, if I had but one worthy object in life, one honourable ambition to which I might soar, and for which I might work—one spot of rest, to which by long effort, by arduous toil, and unflinching perseverance, I might attain unto! Give me a hope, and I will go," he cried, fiercely. "Show me a path, and I will follow it. I am sick of this loathsome life; when I am alone I feel it is a curse. I feel my soul is deadened, and the prayers learnt at the knees of my grandmother, forgotten and futile. Luke, I wish I were dead!"

He struck the pavement with his heel in his vehemence.

"At Wharnby or in London it is utter misery," he cried.

"Redwin, there *is* hope."

"How?"

"The hope of a wife—a faithful, devoted wife, such as you deserve—a wife that will love you for yourself, that will ennoble every action you may do, and reward it with such tokens of affection as shall be balm and comfort even to your dying bed. Redwin, throw off the thoughts that have eaten like rust on the spotless brightness of your mind—look before you with a bold heart, have hope in God, and onwards."

"A wife—a wife! in whom?"

"In Celia Silvernot."

"In Celia! What do you mean?"

"It is she that is worthy of the offering of your love—who I believe will prize it—who will make you happy."

"Luke, to whom are you married?" he asked sharply,

"To Mrs. Morton, the sister of Mr. Dartford, of Cliverton."

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed; "when Boyington told me you were married, I did not think of any other bride for you but Celia. What happened after I left Wharnby?"

"No matter what, Paul," I said; "it is a long story, and reflects no blame on her, and attaches no discredit to her. Much of misconstruction, much of my own wilfulness, brought about the severance of our engagement. It has all happened for the best. I am content—and there is hope for you."

"Why, hope?"

"Redwin, I believe she never entirely forgot the first love of her girlhood. I believe that patient, respectful attention on your part—the earnest purpose of a ripened manhood—would win that love back once more, and make your life a heaven."

"I cannot—I dare not think so."

"Try it. Even in the prosecution of the purpose I have indicated, if it fail and bear no fruit, yet you will become more of the man, and less like its antithesis—the man of the world. But there is hope—there is more than hope for the man who has once had a claim upon her affections—a place in her heart."

"Luke, I know not what to say to this appeal—kind, urgent, and unselfish as it is. I thank you for it; but—but—I must think of it."

"If you will think of it, Paul, I have no fear for the result."

He was thinking of it even then—and to questions which I asked about Paris and his travels, he replied in monosyllables, and answered vaguely.

We parted at my own door, and I watched his tall figure moving with martial strides down the square.

"Oh! Agnes, Agnes—why did you not marry Paul Redwin?"

In the morning, Paul Redwin made his appearance at my house in the square.

"I am going to Wharnby, Luke," said he, with a flushed face and embarrassed air.

"Well spoken."

"I do not say what I am going for, or with what purpose," said he, affecting a light manner that sat ill upon him; "probably one of the wildest goose chases—eh, Elmore?"

"I hope not."

"Candidly, Luke," said he, more gravely, "I do *not* know what I am going home for. I should be sorry to say I am going in search of a wife in Celia Silvernot. I am not worthy of her; and, unless I loved her, I would not

pay her the poor compliment of offering her *my hand* alone. I cannot say I love her now—my senses are in too conflicting a whirl to see anything very clearly—but, Luke, once more in Wharnby, I feel that I shall have a new ambition to strive for; and, in the hope of that ambition, I shall be a better man.”

“When do you go?”

“This morning.”

“This morning?” I repeated, smiling at his impetuosity.

“Why not, this morning?” he asked.

“Oh! I do not advise you to prolong your stay. I am glad to see you availing yourself of the first opportunity to return.”

“Truly, Luke Elmore, you have opened my eyes to the fool’s life I have been leading, and for which I am not sparing in self-reproaches, be assured.”

“Have you paid your farewell respects to Lord Chilvers?”

He laughed.

“I have sent him a thousand pounds—the sum of a silly wager I lost to him, and which will compensate for my non-appearance to his speculative lordship—I have paid for the

honour of his acquaintance, and am quit of him."

"Quit of him for ever, Paul?"

"Yes," he answered quickly; "friends are returning and generous counsellors coming back."

"And Redwin is learning to look forward."

"I shall look forward to seeing you at Wharnby, Luke," he said quickly; "to your return to 'The Rest'—to our old strolls—to our game at chess, by the red winter's fire."

I shook my head.

"I am apart from Wharnby, Redwin."

"Not for a life time."

"It is likely."

"Oh! nonsense," cried Paul; "why it is almost your birth-place, and you will not desert it—and me."

"And Celia!" I added.

He forced a laugh, and hastened to change the topic of conversation.

After staying with me about an hour, during which time Ernestine looked in upon us, and welcomed him, he rose to take his leave.

Throughout the term of this farewell visit,

I detected a feverish restlessness, and excitability in his manner, the result of the sudden change in his wild resolutions, and the birth of the new and more honourable desire, which was the re-action of his heart. There was an alteration in his looks for the better, in the short time that had intervened since I saw him at the Opera—the face seemed clearer, the brow was open and unfurrowed, and amidst all the restlessness and excitability I have spoken of, there was a sparkling look, evidence of the Redwin I had known long ago.

He left me, fully assured of shortly seeing me at Wharnby, and confident of an early meeting between us. He could not reconcile himself to the fact, that London was my home—I had been ever so associated with 'The Rest,' and Wharnby House, that to imagine it was a long parting we were taking, when our hands grasped warmly, and our lips spoke farewell, was to him inconceivable and irrational.

With my heartfelt wishes for the happiness of his future life, for the dawning of the star that was to shed lustre on his path, I parted with this dear friend,—this tried companion,

and staunch heart, and for ever after that good-bye, a yawning gulf increasing day by day, and hour by hour, kept us eternally asunder!

* * * *

Standing on the mountain side, far down its winding path, I look back for one gone, and the Figure threatens with its hand, and still points onwards, implying unto me, who read by signs mysterious and strange to others 'No more in life.'

"No more in life!"

The figure nods its head.

A path more wild, diverging from the steep ascent more rugged and more fierce, falling as it were the darkness, worse than death.

"Not there, stern ruler of my fate—grim genius, that invisible at hours of content, or visible as now, art ever with me, controlling and yet prompting every impulse. Not there! There are mocking voices yelling from the depths of those ebon shades, voices that are calling me, shrieks as of a woman in wild agonies. Not there!"

Still the Figure points.

"Spare me!—I see the faces that were

glaring at me in the streets of the great City, and I dare not meet them. The path is full of horrors, and—God of Heaven!—red with blood!”

I dare not pause. Powerless beneath the will that bends my spirit like a reed, I pass into the darkness worse than death, and the marble hand upon my arm leads me to my destiny.

END OF THE SEVENTH BOOK.

BOOK VIII.



CHAPTER I.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

It is before me! This last section of my history—this section that comprises the deepening of the shades around me—the dread convulsion that has left me what I am. In every stage of these chronicles, written I know not with what reason, or for what shallow purpose, the crisis to which I have been slowly drifting has never left me for one instant. If any eyes but mine dwell at some time, when I am in my grave, on these records of my life, and of those with whom my life has been bound up, they will believe I could have written with no lighter heart, or cast no less a shadow of my own undying thoughts upon this history.

One year has passed since Paul Redwin went to Wharnby. One year and a few days, and it is another summer, and the sun yet shines. I am happy still. Ernestine has recovered from her nervous weakness, and is as she has ever been. We have not sobered down into the man and wife, joined at God's altar three years since, and to whom the bloom of wedded life has been brushed away. In Ernestine there is ever that passionate demonstration of the affections, that studious solicitude concerning me or what I do, that never grows less, and that is exemplified each day. I can but love her with the same romantic fervour, and it seems as if it were but yesterday I made a bride of her. We have once more travelled, and have again returned to London, and our boy is two years old, and a well-spring of deep joy to us. He is a handsome child with dark hair, like his mother's—a gentle, affectionate boy, who usurps all attention, and concentrates round himself all his fond parents' love. There is a strange attachment between us—he seeks me every hour, and sits at my feet, and prattles with his baby tongue about uncle Gilbert and his

aunt, and dear mamma. He is scarcely ever from my sight—he will not leave me even for Ernestine long together, and wanders through the house disconsolate and irritable, at times, when I am absent. Ernestine sighs at this sometimes, and wishes that he were more like other children, and loved the mother above all other ties, and sought more naturally the mother for a child's companion.

But it is a trifling antidote to all this bliss, and home is a palace of the heart.

I hear from Paul Redwin. He writes in the highest spirits, and invites me to his marriage. He tells me of the patient earnestness with which he sought to gain her love, to bring back the affection she had had for him in her girlhood. He confides to me his entire story, and relates how, by sure proofs of his devotion, he won upon her sympathy at last, and revived the flame within her breast. There were many doubts in Celia—whether he loved her as he loved my sister—whether he had really forgotten Agnes—whether it was not another of those visionary whims that had played her falsely when she was younger by some years. But those doubts

vanished in good time. Paul was a man now, with a man's set principles and firm mind; and, in constant intercourse with his old love, he proved the strength of purpose with which he sought her for a wife. He had forgotten my sister. It had been a hard struggle; but, after weeks at Wharnby, with its old associations at every step he took, after hours spent by Celia's side, or in calm discourse with the honest rector, coupled by the sense of the utter exclusion of hope in Agnes, and of her unworthiness, the true light came shining to his heaven, and never faded out.

I do not accept the invitation; I should suggest many unpleasant thoughts, and be a restraint, more or less, upon them. I wish them that prosperity they deserve—that contented bliss which they will attain—and so they marry; and the little rector joins their hands, in the old church where my father and his children—side by side, linked in one common bond—once sat; and there is an end to their sorrow, I believe, in the radiance of the life unfolding before them and around them.

'The Rest,' at Wharnby, is as it has ever been, and Vaudon buried in its recesses.

coiled like a snake, whose venom is exhausted with age, drones out his remaining years, and my brother Edward still remains with him, and keeps aloof from us. Vaudon, contented with the injury bestowed, pauses at this youngest son, and having debased his nature, and narrowed his mind, takes him for the one companion of his life. And so that ill-assorted pair remain dwellers in my father's house, an anomaly of nature. The deep thinker, the stern philosopher, a disciple of Voltaire, and a greater scoffer, abides with my brother at 'The Rest.'

Gilbert and his wife remain inhabitants of the pretty, unpretending cottage, at Paddington, and keep the even tenor of their fortunes. Pleasant writers, both—for they write from the heart, and without malice,—their books and articles, if they make no great sensation, at least obtain a fair marketable price, and enable them, by united efforts, to live contentedly. If there is not that great Genius exemplified, which can raise a fortune by the pen, and can turn the eyes of the world upon the writer, there is that talent above mediocrity which commands attention, and they

are spared the heart-burnings, and the bloodless, but bitter wars against honest well-earned fame. I see them very often, and they exchange evenings with Ernestine and me. Gilbert and his wife are passionately attached to their nephew; and if there be one subject of regret between them—one alloy to their peace—it is that a boy, like mine, should have died at its birth, and not have shed the blessing of its presence round their home—that this frail bud should have been the first and the last!

And Agnes? she is with him yet; and the man himself is more a public mark. I hear his name fifty times a day, in every paper I take up, it is implied, and lurks beneath some covert meaning, and there are many who yell at him in the street as he passes in his carriage—who point menacingly as he crosses the pavement to the entrance of the House of Peers; and one man has shot at his heart, and been imprisoned in a mad-house for the vain attempt. But his poor victim is gradually falling from him despite the hold she strives to retain—there are whispers of other favourites—of fresher faces—and the time

has come for this child of the night,—the old end to an old story.

My aunt and cousin Jane are residents in Sloane Street, and have not changed. My aunt still cries over Sir John's fate and her step-son's ingratitude, and mourns her exclusion from aristocratic circles, and talks about my family with visage expressive of condolence. Jane is not dismayed at all by the dark pictures her mother is so partial to drawing, and demurely prim and gentle as a child—and, perhaps, a trifle old-fashioned—she is as loveable a little woman, destined for old-maidism, as can be found in London itself; and though her mother is not one to appreciate the self-denying habits of her daughter, what a blank would she find in the world before her, if my cousin Jane were married or dead!

My aunt looks her old self for a few days, upon the long expected return of her son, Jack—no longer Jack to society, but Lieutenant Witherby—handsome Lieutenant Witherby, of H.M. ship, 'The Thunderbolt,' and true to the prophecy I had foretold on that night before he joined his ship.

He has grown a strapping young fellow, and his bronzed whiskered face gives no indication of the boy-features of a few years back, though he comes home with the same boy's heart.

Aunt Boyington, gets accustomed to his presence and takes to wiping her eyes, and indulging in sentiment and half-audible groans, but she is very proud to ride with him in the ugly carriage, drawn by the ugly horses Sir George has bestowed upon her, nevertheless, and to show to the friends who have cut her dead, what a fine fellow he is!

Lieutenant Witherby calls on Sir George, and they get quarrelling and rumour asserts that the young sailor took unwarrantable liberties with the strikingly developed nose of the baronet upon an abrupt conclusion to their interview, but he came post-haste to me, and says nothing about so eccentric a finale, and Sir George must be of a timid disposition, or have great faith in Jack's habit of reserve—if it be a fact, for he lets the matter drop.

Lieutenant Witherby is Jack to me, although very proud of his naval cognomen, for all that, and the house in Cavendish Square, holds him

within its walls for an hour or so each day. He takes a violent fancy to little Luke, and gives him his sword to play with, and suffers him to cling, for support, to his great red whiskers with the most perfect good-humour, and brings him toys and large boxes of sweetmeats and books, at every visit, and lowers his dignity and station in the navy by passing half the time on all-fours, for little Luke's sole delectation.

And the watcher in the streets? He comes once more. Late at night I find him before the house as I had discovered him a year since. He is dressed in the height of fashion now, but his hair still curls in dark ringlets, and he puffs a cigar in his mouth in a nonchalant manner. He waits not for my approach, but with a start crosses the road and walks rapidly away. My impulse is to follow him, but a sense of its availing nothing, restrains me, and I enter my house. I make no remark concerning the reappearance of the stranger to Ernestine. — I am fearful that the singularity of the occurrence may needlessly alarm her — I strive to convince myself that it is one of those peculiar coincidences that occur to all of us at odd

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seasons, and that have no meaning, and so the matter rests.

Presently young Witherby startles me with a recurrence to the subject. Three days after the recognition, the young lieutenant asks me bluntly :—

“Who’s that fellow outside? Is he waiting for one of the servants — not for you, is he?”

“For me—of course not!”

“Confound his impertinence, how he stares.”

A window in the front of the house admits light to the room in which this dialogue takes place, and I step to it, and look out into the square.

The man is there, and, unconscious of my observant eyes, makes quickly a sign towards some one at the windows above.

“He evidently knows an inmate of this house. Is he in love with any of the maid-servants, poor fellow?”

“It is mysterious, Jack,” I reply; “but you may have given the right clue. *Yet.*”

“‘Yet’—what?”

“Nothing, Witherby—you must be right.”

The man's small eyes meet mine, and, for a moment, we stand glaring at each other ; then, with an air of affected nonchalance, he wheels gaily round, and saunters from our sight.

A sudden dizziness comes over me, and I reel from the window, and sink into a chair.

"What's the matter, Luke ? Do you feel ill ?" cries Witherby, anxiously.

"No, no—a strange pain in my head," I answer ; "a whirling sensation, that has gone now. I felt, for the moment, as if some nerve or chord had snapped in my brain !"

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST BLOW.

· WHEN one seed of distrust, wafted on the wings of suspicion, falls upon the heart, and takes root therein, what a strong flower it becomes in its rank luxuriance!—what a hold its tendrils, mounting upwards, take upon the mind!—what branches from the parent stem shoot forth!—what blossoms, deadly as the nightshade, burst with their distilling poison over every thought!

On me the seed had fallen, and had taken root. No matter that her love had endured so long, and been exhibited so tenderly; I could but connect the watcher in the streets with her. I could but remember, now, how I had found her praying in her dressing-room;

and yet, remembering also her avowal, that it was for my sake, I yet vaguely disbelieved it.

To whom was he making signs? I knew that Ernestine's room looked upon the Square, and that she was in her room that moment. I knew that he had met me, and asked for Mrs. Morton's house; and that my wife had exhibited signs of great perplexity, and even agony, when I had informed her of the meeting.

But, then, she had said firmly and decisively, 'I do not know the man—I am sure I have never seen him!'

Ernestine could not have uttered a lie like that? No! Away with such ungenerous suspicions!—why should I doubt her love, when love was existent and before me!

Still the plant took deeper root. It was nourished by seeing him from time to time—by coming face to face with him in the street—by meeting him always in the precincts of the square, and in no other place. Was there some mystery from the past, of which this man was cognizant, and which had power over Ernestine?

Fast sped the current of events—deeper and deeper ran the black waters to the sea.

One morning, the first blow from without broke down the outposts of the shrine, and startled me to something more than thought. It was a custom of mine to enter my library about an hour before Ernestine descended to the breakfast-room, and occupy myself with some favourite book until summoned to her presence. But of late I had spent the same period of time in pacing the floor with hurried disjointed steps, heedless of the offerings to the mind, ranged in their rich bindings, on all sides of me.

On the particular morning mentioned, I was striding to and fro, with my dressing-gown folded tightly round me, when a knock at the panel of the door without roused me from my cogitations of deep purport, to listen.

The knock was repeated.

“Come in.”

The door opened, and my valet cautiously entered.

He was a man I had ever had an undefinable repugnance to, although scrupulously exact in his duties, and respectful in his

demeanour ; and this entrance, at a creeping pace, did not tend to allay any unsound objections of mine concerning him. He came in mincingly on tiptoe, his body inclined forwards, and a pair of little red eyes blinking at every step.

“What is it, Marks ?” I asked, sharply.

“You will excuse me—you *will* excuse me, I am sure,” said he, in a whispering tone of voice ; “but the interest of my master is the interest—if I may so speak—of myself ; and I cannot suffer so kind a benefactor to remain in total ignorance of all that is passing in this house.”

This long speech was slowly and monotonously spoken, as if it had been carefully rehearsed beforehand.

Its effect disappointed him. Great as was the shock to my whole system—sharp as were the pangs at every heartstring—I maintained that cool unmoved demeanour which I had shown at his entrance, although everything in the room, and he himself, were whirling round me.

“Will you oblige me by explaining ?”

“Mr. Elmore, before I enter into explana-

tion, it will be necessary for me to respectfully suggest, that anything I make known to you, must be made in strict confidence."

"Go on."

"Mr. Elmore, the honour of a master, is the honour of a servant—it is the duty of the latter individual to guard over the interests of the one who places trust in him, and puts him in an important station in his household."

"I listen."

Every word I uttered seemed choking me, and the room, and books, and valet were whirling faster than before.

"Being of an observant nature, Mr. Elmore, —indeed I was brought up under observant eyes,—any circumstance out of the common way immediately attracts me; consequently when a gentleman lingers about this side of the square, day after day, my curiosity is aroused, and I am watchful."

I sank into a chair, and leant my head upon my hand, and glared at him.

"Proceed—proceed."

It would have been more creditable on my part, to have dismissed this spy—to have

expelled him from the room, but the wild craving for some confirmation of my own fear, withheld me, and I could but listen greedily.

"This gentleman, watched in his turn, became more wary, and it was hide and seek between us, in which I"—with a self-sufficient air, "got the better game."

"Be quick with all you have to relate, spare me comments, and give me facts."

"Yes, sir," with a dry cough, "well, sir, three days since, after you had left the house, Annette ——"

"Who is Annette?"

"Mrs. Elmore's lady's-maid, sir."

I was dumb—it was with an effort I could wave my hand as a sign for him to continue his relation.

"Annette, sir, left the house, and I followed her. She met the gentleman about half-a-mile from here, sir, and gave him a letter, which he opened, read, and returned an answer to by word of mouth. All this I saw with my own eyes, sir."

"Is this all?" I asked, my heart leaping with one hope—a hope that freed suspicion from my Ernestine.

"Not quite, sir," said he, chuckling, "Annette returned, and you came home, sir, and had dinner with my lady, and then went out to your brother's, sir, alone.—Remember, sir?"

"Yes."

"Now, sir, what I am about to say, is with no intention of attributing injurious motives to Mrs. Elmore—I have more than a common respect for ——"

"Well—well."

How the room whirled now!

"Half-an-hour after you had gone, sir, Mrs. Elmore left the house."

"You followed?" I asked, breathlessly.

"Yes, sir."

"And ——?"

"And I saw her," sinking his voice to a still lower tone, "I saw her *meet the man with the ringlets in St. James' Park, take his arm and walk towards Hyde Park Corner*,—where I missed them."

"What more?" I cried, huskily.

"Since then, my lady has met the man once in the same place, but from good authority I have reason to believe their tactics are changed, and he will be here to-night."

"To night!" I yelled.

"Yes, sir; Lieutenant Witherby and you are going to Lady Boyington's, I heard Annette say."

"True."

"If I can be of further use, sir, I am sure I am too much indebted to you, sir, not to make an offer of my services in any way that may be deemed most fitting—I am sure that my respect ——"

"Enough of respect," I said, endeavouring to maintain a self-possession that was mocking me; "when the man leaves this house to-night, watch him to his residence. Here is your fee."

I snatched my purse from my pocket, and hurled it as his hands, motioning, at the same time, to the door.

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Elmore," said he, catching it adroitly; "I am sure this generosity, undeserved on my part, is so kind and so ——"

I stamped with my foot impatiently, and stopping short in his protestations, and adopting the same silent, cat-like tread, he glided from the room and left me to myself.

For a moment I sat surveying the door that had closed upon the spy ; then the horror of my position came with its full force—the utter misery of my future, the dupe that I had been all my life, came with harrowing convictions there were no resisting, and I fell back in the cushioned chair in a dull, death-like swoon, in which, deprived of power to move, to turn my head, to speak one word, I yet remained as in a trance, aware of the place wherein I was, and of the awful secrets I had become possessed of. I lay huddled in the chair, with a weight on body, mind, and limb, with stiffening fingers, and glazed eyes, and swollen tongue, a poor wrecked sufferer with a broken heart.

It was a wild scream that brought me to a sense of my position—it was the consciousness of Ernestine kneeling before me with a white face, convulsed with alarm, that made me, as by a giant force, upheave the load that bore me down and struck me helpless, and stand before her, shaking in every limb.

“ Oh ! Luke !—oh ! dear, dear Luke !—what has happened ? How ill you look—how strange. What is it ? ”

Something of the cunning of the madman came across me, and prompted my reply.

"Nothing, Ernestine, but a headache," said I, passing my hand across my forehead, and sweeping my hair back from it; "I think I must have been asleep."

"Oh! dearest husband!—you are ill—you *are* ill," she repeated with a wild, quivering note of woe.

"I may be a little weak," I said, for I could but totter to the door; "it is strange I should have been so suddenly attacked! But I can walk now. Thank you, Ernestine—thank you—I want no support—I can walk without assistance. *There, see.*"

I made a bolder stride, and fell heavily to the floor, with shriek after shriek of Ernestine ringing in my ears.

* * * *

When my eyes opened to the light, I was in my bed, with Ernestine hanging over me, and a well-known physician by her side.

"What's all this, Elmore?" asked the physician, in a tone of assumed cheerfulness; "come, come, man, we must have none of this."

"What time is it?"

"Never mind the hour, dear," entreated my wife, with my hand in hers.

"What time is it?" I persisted, struggling to withdraw my hand.

"About twelve," answered the physician.

"Call me at five; I am going out at five," said I, freeing myself from her clasp by a strong effort.

"Has he had any sudden shock, Mrs. Elmore?" asked the physician in a whisper.

"No—I hope not. I do not think he can have had," she said, then added, with suspended breath—"But there is no danger, sir?"

"No, I think not."

He drew her aside, and for some time they conferred together in a tone that was inaudible to me.

Presently I was left alone. This was the signal for me to rise and dress, and as I stood before the glass, I felt that an artificial strength was returning to me and supporting me, though every vein in my body ran as with molten lead.

I descended to the parlour, and met Ernestine, who sprang towards me, crying reproachfully—"Oh! Luke."

"I am quite well now," I said; "it was some sudden malady which has left me a little weak, but it is gone now—gone entirely!"

"Dr. —— said you were not to leave your bed, dear," said she dubiously.

"But I am as strong as a lion; let me have some breakfast."

I could not take any refreshment when it was spread before me; my lips turned from the cup I affected to be drinking from with a sickening distaste; and my eyes dwelt upon one object and that was Ernestine.

She sat by the window, glancing wistfully at me, and our boy lay at my feet, and played with his heap of toys on the carpet.

I looked at her glowing face, her matchless loveliness, her small, perfect form, seen to its full advantage in the blue velvet dressing-robe she wore, and thought—was all my happiness gone—crushed at one blow? Was it possible that she, who had demonstrated so much of affection towards me, was false? was it a truth that killed everything but despair?

Then I was reminded of the part I had to play, and how I must dissemble more and more, or my strange manners would put her on her

guard ; I must unravel every thread that led to one end, coolly, cautiously, and with stern circumspection.

“ Order the carriage, Ernestine.”

“ You will not go out, dear ?”

“ The ride will do me good.”

In half an hour we were in the streets, and another half hour took us into the country, and the sweet summer air restored me more to myself. So well did I dissemble my inward agonies that Ernestine, quick and sensitive as she was, became convinced that my old manners had returned, and that it was but a passing indisposition.

My boy sat close to my side all the long ride, plying me with anxious questions, and wondering why I looked so pale.

The physician was awaiting us on our return.

“ Upon my honour, Elmore,” said he, “ you have disobeyed orders in the most audacious manner. But you are better ?”

“ Yes, Doctor.”

“ Mrs. E., will you leave this gentleman with me a moment ?”

When we were alone he harassed me with

embarrassing questions, to all of which I answered in the negative. He asked me about my sensations at the moment; he read the secret of my pains in body and mind correctly, but I denied them all, and persisted in maintaining to him my entire recovery.

Strangely bewildered and baffled, and yet inclined to believe me, knowing no grounds that could actuate me in so firm an assurance, he was borne to his next patient.

Despite Ernestine's entreaties, I started at the appointed time for my aunt's, with my cousin the lieutenant.

What torturing moments were they with my relatives!—what agony to me, in the endeavour to comprehend the subject of discourse, and to falter out some sentence not irrelevant to it! *He* was with her now, in my own house, and yet I was talking calmly about some common-place occurrence! My agitation of nerve became above my command, and they all remarked it.

“Mrs. Elmore said you were unwell, but you would accompany me,” said Witherby; “come, I’ll walk home with you. You must have had enough of our weary chatter for one evening. Come on, there’s a good fellow.”

"I said I would be home at eleven," I replied.

"My dear nephew, you cannot be well, your hand shakes so. Perhaps it *would* be better for you to go home with John," said my aunt.

"I shall go at eleven," said I, decisively.

And at eleven my carriage came for me, and, with heavy-clogged feet, I descended the steps, crossed the pavement, and entered. How my heart beat, how my temples throbbed, as I stood in the large hall of my own house, and the light of the great lamp fell full upon my haggard face. The valet, Marks, came bustling towards me, and took my hat from my extended hand.

"Thank you, sir."

"Has he been?" I asked, in a low murmur.

"Yes, sir."

"Who admitted him?"

"Annette watched her opportunity, and opened the door. It was a great risk, and very inconsiderate, I think. Bad policy—awful policy!"

I staggered to the door of the room, and Ernestine flew towards me, and kissed me fondly on the threshold.

Will she tell me—will she tell me *he* has been? Will she ease this load of misery, greater than I can bear, and save me from hours and days of bitter anguish?—will she confide in me? Oh! God of Mercy! will she hide *all* beneath her smiles?

No word—no sign.

“Any one been, Ernestine?”

“No, dear.”

She changed colour as she spoke, and, as she crossed to the chair from which she had arisen, she pressed her hand upon her breast, as if to still its heaving.

Will she tell me yet? Will not conscience urge her to the confession—no matter what it is—will it not even now? My love is strong, my heart is hers alone, and can bear much. Will not one angel from the many soften her iron will?

I waited each moment—to every word, I leant forward, eager and expectant; but the time passed, and the night hastened, and we were alone in our bridal chamber.

Will she tell me, now?

No word of confession—but signs of anxiety for me and my malady—nothing more.

She slept at last, and I lay awake and watched the grey morning come stealing on behind the blind, and drawing away the veil of mistiness around me. I sat up in my fevered couch, and looked down upon her, so beautiful in her calm sleep, and prayed that she would wake up and tell me all.

But she slept on—and I bowed my head in silent agony, and wept a few bitter, scalding tears.

“They are the last,” I muttered, with the sense of her deceit a greater weight than I had felt it yet. “The morrow has come, and I seek explanations for myself. The morrow is all dreaminess and death; the yesterday that held my love—that charmed my soul—that told me of my happiness—is gone for ever! A few more hours—a few more hours,” I cried, shaking my clenched hands in the air—“and then!”

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CHAPTER III.

THE RESULT!

At a late hour in the morning I left my house, unobserved by Ernestine. I had played the hypocrite before her, and enacted Judas well, and deceived her into the belief that all threatening aspects had vanished with the new day before me.

But my very nature had undergone a change, and I was full of distrust and malice. There was a secret kept from me—hidden from mysight; I was not thought to have sufficient love within me to guarantee its disclosure from her lips, or else it was the worst shame that could descend to me, and I was branded and disgraced.

I met the valet, by appointment, beneath

the arched entrance to the Horse Guards. The last stroke of the bell had not announced twelve, when he came at his old creeping pace from the direction of Parliament Street. He was to the minute, but I had arrived too early, and was maddened by impatience.

“What has detained you?” I cried, fiercely.

“It is twelve—did you not hear the bell strike, sir?”

“Yes, yes,” I said, hastily—“but the man—you watched him last night, Marks?—you promised me you would.”

“I did, sir.”

“Where does he live? Quick!”

“If you follow me, I will show you the house, sir.”

I turned back with the man, and he led the way across the road into Whitehall Yard, through a narrow passage into Whitehall Place and Great Scotland Yard, and then emerging into Northumberland Street, Strand, he pointed to a glass coach standing before a house some distance from me, on the left hand side of the way, on the roof of which several trunks were being placed by the coachman and a maid-servant.

"He is going away—I am in time."

"That is the house, I am sure, sir."

"You can leave me, Marks."

"Leave you, sir?" he exclaimed—loath to be dismissed ere the sequel to the story was disclosed.

"Yes—go, now."

The man still lingered, until meeting my threatening visage bent upon him, he coughed and slunk away, leaving me watching the house and the preparations going on before it.

He came at last. From the house he jauntily stepped forth, the eternal cigar in his mouth, a coat flung across his arm, a tasselled-cane in his right hand.

Ere he could enter the vehicle, as he stood one foot upon the steps, I made a rush forwards, and, griping his arm fiercely, flung him aside, and stood between him and the doorway.

He recoiled, as at the appearance of a phantom.

"I have tracked you at last," I cried ;
"I have discovered you, and I part no more until some elucidation of this hideous mystery be fully entered into."

"I do not know you. Let me pass."

"But I know you, and I will know further, man," I cried passionately; "I will learn your reasons for entering my house like a thief, for playing the spy upon my actions, and watching my entrance and exit at all times of the day. I will unravel the mystery that connects you with my wife. Do you hear me?"

The man had turned pale, but was surveying me with flashing eyes.

"Will you let me go?"

"No."

"It will be better for you."

My answer was a scornful laugh.

"It will be better for you, and me, and Ernestine."

"Ernestine!" I shrieked; "do you dare to call her Ernestine? Does the mystery prove to be but my dishonour?"

"Come into the house with me," said the man, "and I will tell you all. It is your own seeking, so blame me not for what may follow."

We entered the house, and went up a narrow flight of stairs, and into a small and

tawdrily-furnished room on the first-floor. He waved his hand in the direction of a chair, but I made no movement to accept his offer, and stood a few yards from the door, keeping my gaze fixed on him alone.

"This is a damned unpleasant rencontre," said he, after the door was closed, "and will lead to much mischief and cross purposes."

"No matter."

"Elmore," said he, in a conciliatory tone, "let us part as we have met. I give you my word that we shall never meet again."

"I have come to this room for explanation."

"Well, if it must be, it must be," said the man, shrugging his shoulders; "I wash my hands of all blame in the affair before us, and will promise, if required, to keep *your* secret."

He flung his cigar into the empty grate, and stared for some time at me.

"*My secret!*"

"Ay—it will be to your interest to keep it quiet, I take it," said the man; "and as for the affair itself, so far as it regards *me*, that for it."

He snapped his fingers in the air.

"Elmore," said he to me, "we are both

men of the world, and need make no fuss about this droll affair. You will see it in this light, there is no doubt."

"There is no doubt that if this fencing round me continue much longer, sir, I shall tear the secret from your heart," I said, between my set teeth.

The small eyes flashed again, and an evil expression like that upon some grinning head I have seen carved round old cathedral doors, settled on his face.

"The secret is,—that my name is Morton," said he, leaning his back against the mantel-shelf, and swinging the cane in his right hand.

He started from his languid position, at the unearthly cry that issued from my lips, and rang throughout the house. He made a hurried movement of alarm towards the door, but recoiled again at my menacing, and defiant attitude.

"It is a lie—a hellish falsehood!" I cried, foaming at the mouth, "Morton—Morton—God—not her *husband* Morton!"

"Yes," said he, laconically.

I knew not what to do or say; my reason

seemed deserting me, with the shock of this new revelation, and twice I attempted to speak and twice a hand appeared to grasp my throat, and choke my utterance.

"I am going from England directly," said he, quietly, "in a few hours I shall be at Southampton, waiting for my ship—so keep all quiet and you will find me safe, and true as steel."

The sharp tones of his voice recalled me more to myself, and I gasped forth,—

"How long has she known of your existence?—no equivocation—the simple truth alone. There is much weighs upon this answer?"

"Oh! these many years—long before your marriage."

"Before!"

"Yes,—what of it?"

"BEFORE!" I screamed again.

"To be sure. Many are the letters with acceptable remittances I have received in Sicily."

"Why did you report yourself dead?"

"That is irrelevant to the story—Ernestine did not remain in ignorance two years—it was a mercy to enlighten her, was it not?"

I made no answer, I felt that I was going mad!

"In my letters I had often made the declaration that I should never return to England, and that I left her free to act. Forsooth," with a scornful laugh, "she took me at my word!"

"Fiend, have you no compassion for my misery?"

"You would have the secret."

I pressed my hands to my forehead, crying,—"I shall go mad—I shall go mad!"

"Mad about what," said he, carelessly, "the woman fancied you, and you ought to feel obliged. If you wish to be quit of her, there is a grand opportunity for you, man. She was, and is a devil of a temper, and time must have frost-nipped all romance. Look on the bright side of everything—it is a motto worth emblazoning on the gates of every church in England. If you wish to keep all close, why my tongue has been sealed with a golden key from the hands of your fair *wife*—ha! ha!—and you may increase the obligation by ——"

He advanced closer towards me, and was about to lay his hand familiarly on my

shoulder, when I struck at him with all the violence of my hate, and he fell with a bleeding face to the ground, and with a heavy crash that shook the house.

Strangers came running upstairs, and forced their way into the room, and one man attempted to grapple with me, but I struck him off as though he were a child.

"See to him," I said, pointing to the prostrate form. Some one raised him, and he opened his eyes, and looked malignantly at me.

"I will remember this," he roared forth.

"Shall we secure him?" asked two of the lodgers from adjacent apartments, who stood blocking up the doorway.

"Let him go," he cried—"let him pass!—I have a means of vengeance that will blanch his hair to the whiteness of old age; and I will do it, too, so help my God!"

"Do what you will," I muttered.

"Bring back my portmanteau and boxes from the coach, and send away the man," he cried, furiously; "I'll take my full vengeance for this! There is a word called 'Bigamy,'

in 'The Newgate Calendar,' as well as 'Johnson's Dictionary.'

I leaped towards him, but he shrunk behind the new comers, and baffled my approach.

"Coward!"

"You see the man, all of you," he raved, pointing towards me; "that man has robbed me of my wife; has married her, and yet I am alive and well! But there is law in England, and I will have it!"

His words thundered in my ears, and smote my heart with their appalling meaning. I felt all horror, all ignominy ended not with this day; and that, on the name of Elmore still hovered Heaven's curse. My rage abated with the dread conviction of the power that man held within his hands; my reason was more calm, but my despair was more than human.

Breaking through the men and women round the door, I forced my way down-stairs to the street, and ran at a fierce speed homewards.

Homeward! There was no home for me—it was a blackened ruin, standing in its desolation, and speaking of the happiness that had

died with its fall, and of the ashes so thickly strewn about my path. I had no home, no wife—my own loved child was marked with shame, and the best years of my life had been sacrificed in building a lasting monument to my own disgrace!

Running at a swift pace towards Cavendish Square, I formed my plan of action. I adopted the only course that it was right and honourable to do, and in all the turmoil of my excitement that one purpose was irrevocably fixed. Nothing shook it—old memories, past love, the passionate affection—guilty as it was—that had dared all this, I let them all accuse me in their impotence.

I stood within my own room, at last, with Ernestine before me. Whether the consciousness of her life-secret, kept so long and hidden so deeply, glowed upon my face, and spoke out of my lurid eyes, I know not; but she sank back into a chair and quailed from me, looking at me still, with dread, and love, and pity commingled in one glance.

The child was from the room, was out with its nurse, and I felt glad that we were alone in our blank misery.

"Ernestine," said I, in a hollow voice, "all is known by me!"

There was no passion in my voice—there was no passion in my heart; I spoke deep, distinct, and firm—there was a task before me, and it must be fulfilled.

Shrinking and cowering before me, she lay heaped upon the chair, with her hands covering her face.

"I have sought the man out, and wrenched the secret from him; and, though it redounds but to my lasting shame, I feel that it has ended many years of future sin. Dare I regret it, Ernestine?"

Trembling within the chair, she made no answer to me.

"Woman! I can but love you even now, and ——"

She dropped suddenly the hands from her death-like imprinted face with eagerness and hope, and half sprung up from the chair.

"Back, back!" I cried, shudderingly—"there is no hope for you or me in this world; our lives are separate. The tie is sundered with the revelation of our sin!"

She fell back into her old posture, with a wailing cry.

"Ernestine—I can but call you by that name, that old name I have loved so in past happiness—we must separate for ever! Here, in this room, must the seal be set that decrees the final doom to both of us. Breakers of God's laws, we stand accursed in His sight, and the judgment on us we have to abide."

A long convulsive sob was the reply.

"Is it not our duty?"

She looked up again wildly, and cried—

"No!"

"You would choose this life still—you would live on this infamy?"

"I would live on in my love."

"The love was but a name—it was Adultery!"

Another wailing cry.

"Ernestine, I have come to warn you—if you will—to aid you. Fly! It is imperative on your part; the law has been outraged by your sin and mine, and the man—your husband—will become, in his hate and malice, the avenger!"

"I care not," she murmured; "let them take me to a prison-cell—immure me in their dungeons like a common felon. *You* cast me

off like a dog. I care not for my after fate !”

“ No, Ernestine—I cast you off as though I tore my heart bleeding from its seat—as though I consigned my soul to everlasting night. But I dare do this in preference. If there were one excuse—if there were but one thread left of poor extenuation, how gladly would I grasp it !”

Before I could restrain her, she was in my arms—her hands locked behind my neck—her whole form clinging to me in the abandonment of her grief. Her hair had fallen from its place, and showered in luxuriant disorder over her neck and shoulders to the waist, and the streaming eyes were fixed on mine, pleading and beseeching.

“ Oh ! Luke, dear husband !—for you are mine, you *must* be mine, even now—there is all excuse, there is all extenuation ! I loved you madly—I loved you, I believe, as no woman loved before. My whole life was a barren desert without you ; *his* life was spent in foreign lands, supported by my money—he was believed dead, and he *was dead* to me, and had ever blasted each young hope of mine.

You came—you loved me—and I dared all for your love! My honour, name, and fame—I sacrificed them all for these few years of bliss; and it was for you alone I could have dared still more. And have we not been happy?—and can we not be happy even now, by leaving home, England and its threatening doom—by going to foreign lands, with our boy, our dear, dear boy? to that villa by the lake—you remember it, Luke?—*he* was born there!—that Palace of Content, so hallowed in our memory. Oh! forgive me—forgive me, Luke!—it was a woman's sin, and my heart was very weak—let me be your slave, but take me with you—share your life with me!”

The tears were falling from my eyes, and showering upon her; but, strong as was this great temptation, I shook my head, and said—

“I have sinned unwillingly; but to look guilt boldly in the face, and know what laws I am breaking, and what divine commandments I am disregarding in my own cupidity, I cannot do it!”

“Luke! Luke! think again. Have I been less of the faithful wife—less true in a wife's

duty, because there was an interdict from heaven on our marriage?" she said, frantically resisting my gentle efforts to disengage the arms twined round my neck. "Oh! forgive me, and let us seek another land together. Our sorrows will be all forgotten there, I am sure they will—there is no reason to allege against it. Say, Luke, that these are but the first moments of your indignation, telling of no fixed purpose, and that the more generous impulse is to come—to gladden me and fold me to your breast. If I have dared so much—not without a struggle, Luke—not without earnest prayer to God for pardon!—you can at least support me in this new affliction, and comfort me by sharing it. For you *are* my true husband—I have no other—and you have sworn to protect me at the altar."

"To protect my *wife*," I answered, gloomily.

"Think of our child—of its young life! Is there no father's love strong enough to alter the cruel determination you have formed?"

"My child must go with me—there is no other help."

"Luke!" she implored, with straining gaze.

"Let it rather share its father's sorrow.

than its mother's greater affliction and disgrace. Let it go with me where there are none to carp at our story, and bring the flush to his cheek—where, when he grows older, he may pursue some honourable avocation, without a slur upon his parents' history."

"Without a mother?"

"It is best."

"It is death! You leave me not one hope. In your anger you rend every tie from my hands."

"In my anger, Ernestine! I have none. I can forgive you—I do forgive you," pressing her for a moment to me, "but I must adopt some means—indicate some way to take."

"What is to become of me?"

"I will see you safely beyond reach of *his* hands, and of those he may hound upon you in his malice. The remorse in your own heart is justice sufficient, and you must have all my aid. I would tell you that every minute is an object to your safety, Ernestine."

"Let me stay here and die!" she cried; "I have no hope, no wish to live. Let them imprison me for life in dungeon-walls—they have the power, and I—I——"

Her hands relaxed, unfastened, and she sank forwards, and would have fallen, but for my encircling arms. The eyes were closed, the breath seemed suspended, the shadow of death seemed casting that unnatural grey upon her face.

“Ernestine, dear Ernestine—my own, my wife!”

I clasped her to me, and she lay like the dead within my arms. I rang the bell violently, and bade the servants make all haste for the physician, and my own arms bore her light weight up the stairs to her room.

The physician came, and went away, and came again. I sat by the bed-side thinking of nothing but the past love revived now and willing to dare all—to share her sin, and pass my guilty life with her. I called upon her name by old endearing titles, and the white lips made no reply; I brought her son, and placed him before her half-closed eyes, and there was no sign of recognition. More physicians—all the skill that money could command from men of science—and all in vain, for still the day went on, and still she lay there in a death-like stupor.

CHAPTER IV.

THE END.

THE night has not passed away ere all is known concerning that poor silent marble figure in the bed, which faintly breathes, but speaks no word, and knows no familiar face. The servants whisper together about bigamy, and cite cases of the crime, and the sentences that have been passed upon it in their time and knowledge. The officers have been, and have stood within her chamber, looking suspiciously at the one accused, and for whose arrest they hold the warrant, and the head physician, a man of title, imperious and stern, says—

“Touch her at your peril! Her life hangs now upon a thread, and you shall answer for her death.”

They bow to his assertion, and depart, although one man lurks about the servants' hall, and holds his place, and bides his opportunity. Morton keeps aloof from the house, but each hour brings a letter full of threats against me, defying me to touch anything within the house, which is his wife's and his. Each letter, torn into a hundred fragments, strews the floor—a silent mark of my disdain.

I have no thought for Mammon or for the change of life again for me—I care for nothing but to hear her voice, and say I have not been her murderer!

My sense of right is gone—my trust in God a void. I feel that I am bound to her—that she has loved me, and that her crime is love.

The long night sees me by her side, and there is no change from this likeness of the dead. Watchers by her, leaving her not a minute, keep me silent company.

In the first hours of the morning, I am persuaded to descend and see my child, who will not be pacified nor know no comfort, but cries incessantly for his dear mamma—his dear papa.

He runs towards me sobbing—"What is

the matter with mamma? why do they talk of her so much, and will not let me see her?"

"Your mamma is very ill, Luke."

"When will she be better?"

"I do not know. Pray to the God she taught you dwelt above us, that the time may be soon, boy."

"Have you prayed, papa?"

The childish question strikes at me like an arrow. I have not prayed—I have not the courage. Is it right to pray for *that*?—for the bringing of her back to ignominy—to disgrace eternal and indelible, that will live on in police records, and be registered in criminal reports—to the cells of Newgate—to the law's punishment!

I cannot think so, though I dare not wish her dead; though the thought of her passing from me, vanishing from my sight for ever, without one word of parting, is too horrible to contemplate.

"You will be a good boy, Luke, and not disturb mamma by crying for her?"

"If papa wishes it."

I snatch the child to my breast, and gaze long and mournfully at the beautiful ex-

pressive face—so like unto hers ! and wonder what destiny, this boy, so innocent in himself, is born to, and whether the sins of his parents will descend to him, and dishonour his manhood ?

Too young to know what sin is, yet ; too free from guile to understand the mystery that has furrowed my face with those deep lines that will be with me to my grave ; that has stretched his mother on a bed of sickness and of danger ; I wonder if, when he grow old enough to comprehend the story strangers tell him, he will ever wish that he had died in the hour of his guilty birth ?

But can I not hide all from him—cannot *we* ?

Why dwell upon the future—there is no hope—the balance is between death and a prison servitude, for the fallen angel I have loved.

A prison life ! I raise my hands in prayer, at last, above this child's fair head, and murmur to myself —“ If it be not wrong or impious to wish it, as I wish with broken heart, and every hope crushed at my feet, take her, in Thy mercy, Father of all !”

I think again—think of losing her—of her dying in her youth—and recoiling, I retract my prayer, to utter it again when I am by her bedside.

Ever thus—one minute's reflection contradicting a second—no settled mind amidst this vortex in which I am engulfed.

There comes a change. She wakes from her long apathy to a weakness that cannot raise a hand to her head, or move that suffering head upon its weary pillow. She asks for me, but the physician interdicts the wish, and looks grave and decisive.

Day after day, and still I may not see her, and still I wander through the house benighted.

I meet the valet, Marks, and do not know him on the stairs—I pass into the library and stare meaninglessly at the books piled upon the shelves—I descend into the parlour and hearken to the noises in the house, and wait.

The physician comes twice and thrice a day, and each time he looks upon me in my grief, I start up with the eager question :

“How is she?”

"About the same, Mr. Elmore."

"Is there danger?"

"I cannot say," he replies, *evasively*; "her situation is critical in the extreme, but she is young."

"May I see her now?"

"Not yet."

Eternally, 'not yet,' to the same question repeated every visit—to all my pleading, this denial. I feel that I can comfort her, assuage her misery, cast a more brightening radiance on the heavy gloom enwrapping her; I tell him this, but he smiles sadly and thinks not.

Dartford comes from Cliverton, and loads me with a thousand inquiries concerning his sister — about her property? if she has made her Will? where Morton is, and what he is doing?—and my spirit is more deadened in his presence.

Gilbert and his wife attempt to comfort me, and it is in vain; faces of old friends cluster round me, and come each day to learn the last report concerning her, and still she lies within the room, and still the door is barred against me.

I place my boy in Gilbert's hands, and beg

him, until the crisis has passed over, to guard him for my sake, and Gilbert takes the precious prize with reverence, and bears him from the house of woe.

Day by day—no change for better or for worse they say; but that affirmation tells me all is not well above, and that the shadows above the house top are gathering in ominous intensity.

A servant stands before me, and rouses me to a sense of his intrusion, by repeated coughs and shuffling of feet.

“What is it?”

“A woman wishes a moment’s speech with you, sir.”

“With me?”

“Yes, sir.”

I forget the question until the man, after long silence, slowly repeats it in my ear.

“I can see no one; tell the woman so.”

“Yes, sir.”

Another day—Ernestine still denied my yearning heart. The physician answers, “Not yet,” in deeper, graver tones, and leaves me hastily. At night the servant summons me to present hours, by saying:—

"The woman's come again."

"What woman?"

"She who called last night, sir."

"Who is she?"

"A poor woman, sir."

"What does she want?"

"She will tell her business to no one but yourself, sir."

"I will not see her," I cry, passionately—"a week—a month hence. This is no time for stranger's sorrow and beggar's importunity."

(One more day. The physician stays longer this time in the chamber of the sick, and I am jealous of him, and count each hour on my watch, until he comes to me in my lonely room.

"How is she, Sir ——?"

"Mr. Elmore, are you prepared to hear the worst?"

I read the worst upon his face, and stand before him benumbed and horror-stricken.

"I am prepared as man can be."

"Mr. Elmore, I am grieved to say, there is no hope. I am grieved to say that the weakness has been slowly, surely increasing every day since she recovered consciousness, and that no skill of mine can save her."

“No hope!”

He closes the door, and leads me to a seat, and takes another beside me, and says kindly:

“The peculiar circumstances that have arisen, and have caused this sudden shock to Mrs. Elmore, must, in some degree, tend to reconcile you to the certainty of losing her. I do not say they do now, in the first bitter moments, my dear sir, but in the future they will be consolation to you. God has ordered it for the best.”

“God has afflicted me all my life!”

“Hush! sir. It is man’s passions, or man’s weakness, brings misfortune unto him—not his Maker.”

I answer not.

“Yours is a strange story, and the end of it is better thus. Even now the conviction surely forces itself upon you,” he continued. “Common reason will urge it is the lesser sorrow. Had God spared her, Mr. Elmore, it would have been an unbearable affliction for you both.”

“May I see her now?”

He hesitates, and says at last, “To-morrow she may be more composed.”

"How long will—will this weakness last upon her?" I ask, tremblingly.

"It is uncertain. It may be a day—it may be a week."

"And yet, in this uncertainty, you will doom me to suspense? In one hour she may fade away, and my ears have not listened to one last injunction."

After some reflection, he says — "Come with me. I cannot leave you alone; but if you will bear my presence in the room, and abide by my commands, you may see her."

"I am in your hands, sir."

As we go up-stairs, I ask—"Has she ever wished to see me?"

"Your name has seldom left her lips."

Bidding me wait without, he glides in to prepare her, and I stand with plunging heart upon the landing-place. The nurse comes rustling from the room, and whispers—"You may go in now, sir;" and, with leaden feet, I drag myself into the chamber of my poor dying wife. My wife before Heaven, and in His sight!

The air is thick and oppressive—there seems a vapour over everything; a pastile is

burning on the dressing-table, and the physician, with his back towards me, stands leaning on his gold-mounted stick, and looks gravely at the carpet.

The curtains are drawn back, and she is there! So pale, so thin, so fragile in appearance, that when I meet the wan smile on her parched lips, and note the attenuated hand, she with an effort draws from beneath the bed-clothes and extends towards me, I give a cry of anguish, and bury my face in the pillow by her side. The hand rests gently on my head.

“Dear Luke, am I forgiven now?”

“Ask not forgiveness of me,” I groan; “this misery, this home-annihilation is my own work, and caused by me alone.”

“Not so, dear husband,” she says—“may I call you husband?” she asks, timidly.

I can but press her hand for my reply.


“He has prepared you?”

“Yes.”

“I feel it is a mercy vouchsafed to me. I can bear to die, having no hope to live for.”

“Live for me!”

She faintly smiles, and murmurs—“That is beyond my power, now!”



"If I had but said it on that morning!"

"No, no—you acted nobly, Luke, and God will bless you for it. This has saved years of sin for both of us."

"Dear wife!"

"Will you not look at me, Luke? Do you fear to meet my glance?"

I raise my head and look at her, retaining her fevered hand in mine.

"Luke, with the kind assistance of our friend," indicating the physician, by a motion of her head, "and of a legal gentleman well well known to him, I have made my Will."

"Ernestine!" I cry, fearfully.

"I have not wounded your sensitive nature, dearest?—you will say I have acted well."

"Mrs. Elmore, I think this explanation may be deferred until the morrow," breaks in the man of medicine.

"No no!" cries Ernestine, clutching my hand nervously; "he *must* hear all to-night. I wish it, sir, indeed, I do. You will let him stay?" she asks, imploringly.

"Five minutes," he replies.

"The illegality of our marriage being proved, has again made me the mistress of my own fortune, dearest," she continues, in a low

voice, that long sickness has weakened, and rendered almost inaudible; "that fortune, had I died without a Will, would have descended to my brother. I have adopted a wiser course, in making this good man and your brother Gilbert my executors, and in bequeathing all my possessions to my son—illegitimately born!"

A red flush sweeps across her face and passes.

"It is my atonement," she says; "is it just?"

I can but answer, "Yes."

"I must see my boy to-morrow, Luke.—You have promised me,"—to the physician,—
"that he may come to-morrow?"

"Yes, madam."

"May I see him to-night?" she cries, suddenly.

"The hour is late, and the excitement would be much too great," he answers.

"Luke," turning to me, with a wild light in her dark eyes, "I must see our dear boy to-night!"

"My dear madam," cries the doctor, interposing, "you will obey me, I am sure. It is impossible."

"Supposing I were to die to-night?" she cries,—“to die without seeing him—my darling child!”

“Madam, I must beg you to be calm,” entreats he, “Mr. Elmore, will you oblige me by retiring. This interview has already lasted too long.”

“If it be inconsistent with my safety—with a few short days of life,—I will risk all to see him, sir.”

“It cannot be. To-morrow.”

“*Ah! to-morrow.*”

She heaves one long quivering sigh, and says no more in intercession. The physician begs me once more to retire, and reminds me of my promise to him.

Reluctantly I bow my head in assent, and stooping over the bed, press my lips to her hot face. Both arms are round me now, and she clings to me, and whispers, fearfully,—“do stay—*do* stay, dear Luke!”

“I dare not, Ernestine,—my life,” I say, “I cannot, to gratify my selfishness, prolong this interview.”

“You will go?”

“I must!”

She kisses me long and passionately, and lets her arms relax, and murmurs—"Heaven bless you," and watches me from the room with an anxious, longing gaze.

In my solitary chamber I kneel before the Invisible Throne, on which He sits and ever watches, and pray for her till the morning comes again—pray for her till a violent knocking without, convulses me in every limb, and I cry out—"Who is there?"

"Oh! sir—oh! sir—mistress is dead!"

"Oh! God—oh! mercy!"

I fling the door back, and stride out.

It is too late—it is too true! From her slumber by the fire, the nurse wakes to the presence of the Dead—to find there is no need of longer watch! Without her son, without her erring husband, she has died, and on the white sculptured face, it seems as if she left the world in peace, and breathed out her soul without a struggle in her awful loneliness.

Oh! wife, whose sin was love, whose idol was the erring sinner weeping over thine eternal sleep, may thy false step be blotted from the Book, by One who pardoned sins like thine, ere he died upon Mount Calvary!

CHAPTER V.

UTTER DARKNESS.

FROM the hour I found her dead within her room, and knew that she had died alone, and, perhaps, had called my name and her dear son's in her last agony, in the final craving for one face beside her death-bed, my nature hardened into stone. Gloomy, morose, and full of enmity to fellow man, day by day I sat in my room with its darkened windows, symbolical of my loss, and the night that lived for me, and shunned every solace that friends and brother came to give me.

I could not bear them, I could not listen to their well-meant advice, I could not comprehend of what they were discoursing. They

came and went before me like figures in a dream, and yet I sat there in my grim reality.

She was dead, and I had killed her! There was no satisfaction for me in that which might have happened had she lived—there was no comforting assurance that I had sought to act in conformity with precepts dealt from Heaven—there was nothing but despair. I knew no one, I answered no one, I scarce touched food or moved from one position; I avoided my couch of rest at night, and companionship by day, until they laid her in her grave, and I mourned over it.

She was lost *then*—she was shut for ever from my sight. Her youth had ended where the placid joys of other youth begin, where life, divested of its gaudy hue of romance and fancy, sobers down to the calm reality, and is not less happy in content.

I grew more morose, and less capable of self-command. Every nerve was strung so lightly and so sensitively, that a word jarred upon it and woke up a frenzy. Even a noise upon the stair—a foot-fall passing heavily without—the sudden entrance of a menial—the accidental contact with a stranger brush-

ing by me in the street—for I had been persuaded to walk out from the house of mourning, and had suffered Gilbert or young Witherby to be the guides to the old age of my mind—unmanned me. I had not seen my child—I had not the courage to look upon him yet—he was so like his mother!

Young as I was, I had seen so much of sorrow, and the last blow had been so heavy in its strength—had struck down all that I had been rearing for so many years—that my face was shrivelled like that of an old man's, and my hair was thickly streaked with white. No changes that I had read of in books on human form had altered man more than this calamity had transformed me—but then, what had I not lost?

Dartford, *her* brother, after following Ernestine to her last dwelling-place, took his cold departure, and went back to Cliverton, no richer man than he had come from it. Morton, baffled in his last stroke, had also gone to follow his old life, careless of the hour when to his Maker he should deliver up his stewardship.

He had been a bad man from his youth.

He had married Ernestine for a wild caprice, as regarded her beauty, for a studied motive as concerned her money, and when baffled in his wish to become the master of her wealth, he schemed to break her spirit and to crush out her life. In his dissipations he had endangered his own health, and medical advice had forced him to a milder climate. There, despairing of obtaining further means from Ernestine to keep him in his viciousness, and forming an intrigue with a wealthy widow at Sicily, he had promulgated a report of his death in England, and had found accomplices to write to Ernestine, acquainting her of the fact. He passed to Italy, married the widow, and saw her die one year after the evil union between them. Master of her wealth, he travelled through foreign cities in his wild course, until he had exhausted his ill-begotten legacy, and was on the verge of poverty. Then he wrote to Ernestine, and agreed to remain from England all his life, upon the annual payment of a sum of money sufficient to support him in his recklessness. This promise he had kept until the time I first met him in the Square. That time he had been

bought off once more ; but losing all by one stroke at a gaming table in Paris, he had returned, had received a further bribe, and had brought about the end that spread such devastation, and cast over all such fatal blight.

Three weeks after her death, I summoned courage to see my child, and at the first moment of our interview he clung to me, begging to be taken home to his mamma. He loved his uncle and aunt very dearly, and they were very kind, but he would rather go home with papa, and see his mother !

There is one tie yet to earth, one thing to love, and I take my boy home and make an idol of him. The affection between us becomes greater than before, and he is never from my sight.

She had been dead one month—one month to the day—when I sat in the room in which the physician had come to me and prepared me for the worst. The hour was nine at night, and my child had been taken smiling to his bed.

Oh ! happy youth, envied childhood, that can so easily forget !

Whilst in my old brooding position, the servant entered.

"If you please, Mr. Elmore, that woman's come again."

"Come again!" I answered, "I do not understand you."

"There was a woman called when Mrs. Mor—Elmore was very ill, and you would not see her, sir, if you recollect."

"I have a faint remembrance."

"I told her you couldn't be disturbed by her now, sir; but still she persists, and says it is important."

"Let her be shown to this room."

"Yes, sir."

The servant retired, and in a few minutes returned, ushering in a tall gaunt woman, with sunken eyes and wasted cheeks, whose dress was hidden by a large shawl, darned and patched in many places.

She took the seat indicated by a motion of my hand, and the servant withdrew and left us alone together.

"You desire an interview with me?"

"Yes, sir," she answered in a respectful tone.

"You require relief from my hands — you have some tale of misery and woe to tell me. Spare me it, my own sorrows are enough! I can believe all that your story has to tell by looking in your face, but I wish not to listen to its recital. Will that alleviate your present distress, my good woman?"

I laid a guinea on the table, and she sat and glanced wistfully at it, but did not reach out her hand in its direction.

"I have hardly come with that object, Mr. Elmore."

"I am at a loss to guess it then."

"I have come to ask you to accompany me some distance — it is imperative, that you should do so."

"Imperative!"

"It is the request of an old friend of yours who is in deep distress, and who requires your aid."

"His name?"

"I am forbidden to disclose the name, unless you positively refuse to come."

"Refuse to come, undoubtedly," I said; "how do I know this story is not all a trick?"

I thought of Morton, and of some danger at his hands.

"You will not come?"

"Not till I know further," I answered; "be more explicit and show less of this theatrical manner, woman."

"Theatrical," she echoed with a wan smile "well perhaps it is! Mr. Elmore," asked she; "if I tell you the name, will you promise to come?"

"If I see sufficient reason for the journey."

"I will tell you then. You should have asked me some time ago '*her* name' not '*his*.'"

"Well."

"Her name is Elmore, like your own."

"Elmore—my sister—is it of my sister?"

"No, sir—of your *mother*!"

The grave inflexibility with which I had listened to the woman, gave way at that last name and roused me to a passionate interest in all she said. Stunned by the shock I could but repeat "mother!" and make signs for her to proceed.

"Your mother is in great distress, as I have already said, sir, and requires help and —— money."

"I am ready to follow 'you,'" I said, rising from my seat.

When we were in the street, the woman, with her shawl tightly drawn over her shoulders moved a few paces in advance, in the direction of Westminster Bridge.

Had there been a plan in all this, it could not have succeeded better in the desired object—the name of 'mother' (hallowed name to all but me!) had been the loadstone to draw me from my calm reflection and lure me onwards. My mother in distress! There was no time to pause or to deliberate: guilty as she was.—I felt it as a duty.

I followed the tall form of the woman along the streets, and over the dimly lighted bridge.

What were the feelings that actuated me, and drew me from my apathy? Was I going to claim my mother, to fold her to my breast, or to reproach her, as I had a son's right to reproach?

Turning to the right, we wound along dark, narrow streets, through Bishop's Walk, and into a narrow lane, formed of grimy wharves and warehouses, and factories. "Here!" I

cried, as she stopped at the entrance of a low street, that turned in the direction of Lambeth.

"This is the street."

"Lead the way."

She halted at a house about half-way down the street, and drawing a key from her pocket, proceeded to unlock the door.

There was a feeble light glimmering from an up-stairs window destitute of blind, and the figure of a woman came and stood close against the glass and seemed endeavouring to peer through the darkness at us, as we stood beneath. The woman unlocked the door, and admitted me. After securing it on the inside, she preceded me up a flight of creaking stairs to the room-door above.

"This is a difference from Cavendish Square, sir," said she, insinuatingly.

"Open the door," I answered.

She complied with my request, and into the room we slowly entered.

It was a small, low ceilinged room, almost destitute of furniture, with rudely-plastered walls, and bare blackened floor, strewed with heaps of what appeared to me, parti-coloured rags. Still standing by the blindless window

with the dark night for a background to her figure, was my mother—I felt it was my mother, although every feature was in itself unrecognised. Pale, haggard, wasted by sickness as it was, yet that frail light figure reminded me of Agnes, and in the white, ghastly, seamed face I thought I could see a dim likeness to the daughter—an indistinct outline of what she herself had been once, in her husband's home as well as in her pride of infamy.

She made no movement towards me; she even checked my own advance by a slight shrinking backwards, and instinctively I stopped. There was agitation in her face, but there was no *affection*—my jealous, watchful glance detected that. We had not met for any outpourings of soul, her's had been long deadened, and had little promptings of maternity; save the faint agitation—last instinct of nature—at knowing it was her son before her, she was cold and unimpassioned.

There was but one chair in the room, and the woman who had been my guide pushed it towards me. Declining its offer, I stood with straining gaze directed to my mother.

“You are Luke?”

A husky ‘yes’ was my response.

“Divided as we have been so long, and knowing what has so long divided us, it has been a hard struggle to allow this meeting. But I am a beggar—and you are a rich man!”

She spoke with an unfaltering voice—a deep, ringing voice—that vibrated through me.

“Yet we have been both unfortunate,” she continued. “A few years since I could have commanded thousands. When I was in Paris I was worshipped as a goddess!”

She said it proudly, even now; she mourned for her poverty—but not one word was there indicative of a just repentance.

“But a frightful sickness stretched me prostrate—changed me almost as horribly as I am now changed—caused all to desert me—and then my misfortunes began. From bad to worse—from bad to worse—until you see me in this den. And even this becomes to good for me. I have lost my engagement—we have both done so, and are starving!”

“Engagement?” I said, dreamily.

"Mrs. Elmore alludes to her stage life at the 'Coburg,'" explained the woman.

"Good God!"

"Under another name, mind," quickly said my mother—"I did not disgrace the name."

"You were politic," I answered, bitterly.

I could not master my rising indignation. This unnatural manner roused me to a sense of my position and her own—this selfish maundering only told me of what a mother I had reason to be proud of.

"So I have appealed to you at last. I had hoped never to have done so; but circumstances, as you see, have forced me. When I left you all, I thought it was for ever—but that was not to be. And, Luke, from the time you met me in Park Lane, and called out my christian name, I have looked to you as a last resource."

"Was it you?"

"Ah! you may well be surprised—and I was a lady born, too."

"Woman! have you met me but to speak like this?" I started, losing all control over my rising anger. "Is there not one expression of regret for others?—as if you had been

unfortunate without a cause to make you, or without a sin wherewith to reproach yourself! Why do you not ask about my father, or mourn for the blight you cast around his life, and the grave you dug so early for him? Why not of Agnes, your own daughter, whose life has followed yours—whose feet have strayed down the same path, and profited by the same vile example? Has the mother no wish to hear of *them*, or of her sons, divided, disunited from her and from each other? Has she fallen to this misery, and has it taught no lesson?"

Startled by my vehemence, she yet looked at me defiantly.

"Speak, woman!—unworthy of a mother's name—say something! Prove that there is one spark of a better nature in you—not all trodden out upon your guilty course!"

"My days of repentance are gone, Luke Elmore," she cried, fiercely. "At one time, I will own it even to you, I felt the sting, and writhed beneath it. At the time when he with whom I first fled deserted me in his turn, and left me in a foreign city, I felt it the most deeply. But I shook my cares off—I cast

them all aside," she said, brandishing her arms in the air, as if she threw something from her—"I chose my life, and I was happy till that fatal illness."

"Happy!" I repeated.

"But, now!" she shrieked, without heeding my remark—"look at me now! Do I not make a good moral for a sentimental book?—what divines could not prate of me from cushioned pulpits! Do I not suffer in myself enough, without repentance or contrition? Have I not enough to bear, without ransacking my mind for fresh causes of self-torture?"

"What do you desire of me?" I asked, coldly.

"I wish to leave England. I wish to go to America with this friend of mine. There are great openings of life in America."

I did not ask her plans—I did not comment upon her talk of openings in life—she to whom life was fast fading out, and upon whose face the little time the world would be of interest to her, was plainly evident.

"What money will suffice?"

"A hundred pounds."

The other woman came round, and stared

greedily in my face to note the effect of the demand upon me.

"You shall have it. Give me the address of this place, and I will send the sum required in the morning."

The woman hurriedly laid before me a torn sheet of paper and the stump of a lead pencil, and I wrote the address to her dictation.

"There is nothing more to say," I said, gravely. "The interview—how different from what I had expected!—is over, and I regret that it should have ever taken place. I would rather have died without meeting you—remembering you ever as the mother, I had seen last in my childhood."

For the first time her lip quivered.

"I would have rather seen your tomb, or stood beside your dying bed than this," I said.

"If you had come to me to night—erring as you are, and full of crime as your path has been—if you had come to me truly penitent, I would have shielded you beneath my own roof, and shared my life with yours."

"You—*you* would have done this?"

"Without a moment's hesitation," I replied; "nay, more, you should have seen

your eldest born—your Gilbert, and would have found in him, a son, indeed ! But there is no mother's heart with us."

"You may go, now," she said, gloomily.

"There is time yet for repentance," I said ; "if the conscience could but awake—no matter to what horrors—you might yet repent. Think of it—*mother*."

"No," she answered, shuddering.

"Think of your husband—he died a wrecked man ! From the night you fled, and tore from him all that love he had for you—you left his children a pale, care-worn father, stern, wild, and mentally diseased."

She turned from me, and, looking into the narrow, loathsome street, said—

"Go, now—go ! I want to hear no more."

I laid my hand upon the door, then said—

"There is one question to be asked. Concerning the man who first brought about this evil—who, defying God's sacred laws, strived hard (as he must have strived) to wean you from that devotion you once had for my father—what has become of that accursed villian ?"

"I know not."

"Is there no clue by which I can track

him, and revenge the evil he has brought about?"

"He can never be traced—and it is not your right."

"It is my right," said I, firmly. "I am commanded!"

"I do not understand."

"No matter. Is there not one thread, however broken, by which Sir William Ashford can ——"

"What—what?" she shrieked, facing me again; "Sir William Ashford—did you say Sir William Ashford?"

"The name is not forgotten by either you or me."

"Is *his* name still spoken of as connected with my own in that elopement?" she cried, "has it never been known—never?"

"*What!*"

"It was not he, although the will was not lacking on his part. He was duped, too—he was the blind."

"The name—the name. I have a wild surmise, but I dare not give it utterance. Quick, quick!—the name, for heaven's sake!"

"VAUDON!"

With a piercing cry I flung my arms above my head, invoking God's curse on him, with an intensity of feeling that startled even the mother and her friend.

"The hour has come at last, and I am the avenger!" I cried; "it is the last drop in the cup—the last proof of the villain he has been. I will foil him—I will lay bare the long hypocrisy in its naked hideousness—I will revenge the wrongs of my poor father—wronged even in his grave. I swear it standing here before his victim!"

"Do you know where he is?" asked my mother, advancing towards me in her eagerness, and slightly resting a finger on my arm.

"I do."

"Is he well—prosperous?"

"Both."

She ground her teeth silently together.

"Do you wish to hear more of this man?" I hissed—"how he was my father's friend all his life, and how he eventually became my father's heir? But I will revenge him—I have sworn it in Wharnby's own churchyard!"

"His heir!" exclaimed my mother.

“The story is too long—and what avails its narration? I could not tell it, if I had the will. I must go out—I must have air—I am stifling!”

I dashed out of the room, and groped my way down the creaking stairs, opened the outer door, and stood in the narrow, dirty street.

Glaring up at the 'sky, which was blood-red towards the east, as if lit up with fire, I stood for some minutes on the door-step. My brain was burning—one terrible thought possessed it—I read it everywhere, on the dark warehouses before me, in the fiery sky above my head.

“Vaudon—Vaudon—the day of reparation has arrived!”

I strode into the roadway with my hands clenched, and my lips compressed.

The woman who had brought me to the place came stealing from the doorway.

“Mr. Elmore!”

“Well!”

“Your mother is not always thus, sir—you must not think her quite so callous. She sits sometimes and moans for hours by the empty fire-grate. To-night she has been hardly herself.”

"She is an actress."

"It was to spare a scene, sir, and I think it was best. Are you going, sir?"

"I am. Take care of my mother—I shall never see her more."

"And, sir, you will not forget the money?"

"Ah! the money! No, I will not forget."

I hurried away, and the door closed softly on me.

I had seen her—more lost and more abandoned than ever I had dreamed—this fairy-like mother of my youth! Yet in the whirl of brain that *one* revelation had brought about in this sad meeting, I could forget her, and it seemed as if before me whilst I hastened homewards, I could see 'The Rest' upon the cliffs, and my father beckoning unto me with that look upon his face which he had had when he died within my arms.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST SACRIFICE.

‘It is the duty of a son to avenge a family’s dishonour. The stain that rests upon the name of Elmore is still branding it, and a whole life’s curse is covering it with shame. Seek not the quarrel, but abide the time. It will come one day to the father or the son, and then act. For the seducer and adulterer, there is but one atonement!’

No afflictions that had befallen me had had power to erase from my memory those words which he had written. Unprofitable and sinful as they were in their commands, they tallied with my own maddening wish, my own burning impulse to avenge his wrongs. He had said that it would come one day to the

father or the son, and it had come to me. He had never thought that *his* life would bring the villain to the light—the first words of his stern exhortation were the proof—but he had trusted in his sons to act as he, with old, exploded notions of honour, would have acted had he lived. How much less did he think then that the man who had wronged him, bowed his head, dishonoured his name, shaken his reason, made a drunkard of him, was the man he met upon the sands when I was but a child.

‘There is but one atonement!’—and that shall be. I swore it looking on his Rest, the day I met Jacques Vaudon, and walked home with him. If he had known the settled purpose I had formed, the letter my father had written, in some hour when depressed beneath his shame, and which was within my breast, cold and deep as characterised his every action, he might have betrayed himself that morning.

I had found his secret; I had discovered that his hate extended further back than the children of his friend; and I had all this to have retaliation for. I would do it alone. Gilbert had a wife—was happy—had every-

thing to live for : I had been afflicted with a curse all my life, and it mattered not to me if that life reached a premature conclusion, save that he would live after it, perhaps, and be safe from further vengeance.

Calmly, but resolutely, I set about the end I had in view ; it seemed the last stroke I was destined to fulfil.

I weighed carefully all consequences, and looked my future in the face. If I fell, my child was provided for. If I shot him, as I believed I should, I must fly and become an exile from my home. Did *that* matter ?

No, to me I felt that it would be relief—that I was but fit for a solitary life—that, with every hope buried and all existence a blank, I should but cast the shadow of my own despair on the child left to me by Ernestine.

The child ! There was the first and greatest shock. My love had grown with his, and to sacrifice it for his future peace, and to unselfishly part with him, and be quite alone, was a struggle which I engaged in, and came off a victor.

Yes, I would part with my boy—I would

take him to his uncle Gilbert, and leave him there, and go upon my way. He would be that blessing to them which I had dreamt he would have been to me; and I should be in my grave, or in a foreign land, with the mark of Cain upon me. I felt, in either case, we should be sundered, and for ever apart. I felt that, with Gilbert, he would grow up generous, high-minded, and affectionate; and that I should but mar his prospects if I took him with me to the wilderness. I would tell no one of my project—leave the child as for a day, and fly for ever.

It was a bitter resolution, but my courage did not fail me. It was but one more sorrow—the last. I could have none other after that! So I wrote a letter to Gilbert, which I intended to post at Wharnby, if I survived, and to remit by Edward, if I fell—a long letter, bidding him farewell, written with a shaking hand, but unstained with a single tear. My fount of grief was exhausted—I could give no outward sign of it since *she* had left me—my eyes seemed burnt and dried up within my head, and glowed therein like heated coals. Yet it cost me hours and hours

to write that letter—was put off till morning, and then again till night—was written line by line, and each sentence weighed as if it were the pronouncement of a doom. A few lines to Agnes—the transmission of double the sum required to my mother in her hovel near the water-side—the arrangement of my own small property — the transferring of the house in which I lived to my brother—and then all was ready and prepared, and fate was waiting for the sequel.

For one week I devoted myself entirely to my boy. It was an unwise act, and cost me many years of after-suffering—it was binding more closely bonds around my soul, which I was forced to burst through, and leave them torn and bleeding on the earth. It was loving the boy more ardently to lose him. But then my selfish heart told me it would be years before the impression of that week would fade away from this only son, and that he would bear in memory the remembrance of his father long after that father had been lost to him.

So the week passed—and one autumn evening, after one last struggle, I took him to his uncle, in the carriage. I had not been forget-

ful of the boy's future peace, in the week that I had spent with him ; I had told him so much of Gilbert—spoken so warmly in his praise, and of his open heart, and taught my child to love him almost like a father. I knew that to Gilbert and his wife there could be no greater blessing than this boy ; and that they would carefully treasure him for their sakes and my own.

It was nine in the evening ; it had been a weary day for me—a day spent in final arrangements, in making calls (as if they were chance ones) on the Boyingtons and young Witherby, who were so unsuspecting of the final parting we were taking with each other.

By strong and repeated efforts I masked the conflicting and tumultuous war within by the dispirited manner now habitual to me ; I wrestled with my passion of grief, and in their presence subdued it—compressed it, as it were, in the inner depths of my heart, too well aware of the rebound when the forced weight upon it was removed, and I was left alone.

“ Gilbert, I have brought Luke to spend a few days with you.”

Gilbert's face lighted up with satisfaction—and his wife had already seated my child upon her knee.

“No spring flower is more welcome,” answered my brother.

“He will harass you, perhaps?” I asked, anxiously.

“Harass!” cried Gilbert—“I wish I were doomed to perpetual harass of such-like nature, brother.”

It was a long evening I spent with him—we had much to say, and I had much to tell him.

For the first time I broke to him the interview with my mother, and he listened with a fearful interest. I did not tell him of Vaudon, and all that I had discovered concerning him, lest some untoward event should occur to frustrate my project, or he should assert his right to vindicate the name he bore with me. With trembling fingers he took down the address of the house I mentioned, as having met my mother at, and spoke of his determination to proceed in search of her, early the next morning. I thought that it was useless, even if she were not already gone, and seek-

ing mental trouble for no purpose, but he was resolved.

If she told him of Vaudon—it would be too late then, and I should be on my journey, and ere the night set in at Wharnby. I prolonged my stay with Gilbert. I could not tear myself away; the carriage,—sign of my old rank that still abided with me,—had been waiting without an hour; and though I had made two movements to depart, I had again fallen into my chair with a sinking heart. The child *must* be parted with—my stay was already engendering grave doubts—the hour was late, and I was there and lingering yet.

“Can I offer you a room to-night, Luke?” asked Gilbert, observing my reluctance to retire.

“No, no, I thank you,” cried I, starting up and glancing at him with suspicion,—“why did you ask me, Gilbert?”

“I thought you might feel it dull, returning without the child, that is all, brother.”

“Thank you—thank you, but I would rather go. Good-bye, good-night!”

I wrung his hand in mine, and took a last earnest look at him, and then turning to his

wife, I kissed her, and invoked a secret prayer for their life's happiness, and lasting peace.

Then came my boy,—I snatched him from the ground, strained him in my arms, and held him to my breast as I felt assured I should never hold him more. He would grow up to be a man—years on years would drift by, each one cancelling some recollection of me, until some day when he was married himself, and was happy in his home and wife, he would forget me entirely, and other cares, other objects of attention would obliterate, nay, annihilate all thought of me!

"I think I would rather go back with you, papa," he said, wistfully, as I still retained him in my embrace.

"No, you will be a good boy and stay with uncle Gilbert, I am sure."

"But you are going home alone."

"Yes, and shall leave you here to love your aunt and uncle—you must try to love them," I said, in a lower tone,—“as well as you do me.”

"Oh! that I can never do, papa."

"But you will try?"

"Why must I try?"

"Because they love you so."

"And when will you come and fetch me back?"

"Soon—soon."

"Three days—four days?" he prattled on, "papa will be so dull* without me—oh! so very dull! In four days he will come for me?"

"To be sure—four days—what are four days, they are soon gone—gone ere we scarcely know they have been here."

"In four days then?"

"Ay!"

I set him down reluctantly, and pressed one last yearning kiss upon his lips. I shrunk from the boy's eyes—they seemed reading my thoughts, and deciphering the intention written on my furrowed brow.

It was the last link in the chain that rivetted me to my fate, when I let the first-born pledge of my unhappy love pass from my arms, from my sight, from my hope.

A stern, momentary reverie, and then I tore myself away from him, and walked slowly and moodily to the carriage.

Ere I was within, Gilbert's hand was laid upon my arm.

"I do not like leaving you to-night, Luke," he said. "I am not superstitious, brother,—but I would rather you did not go home alone."

"Why, Gilbert?"

"I cannot tell why; it is an impression that will not bear a definition," said Gilbert, "perhaps your own manner has alarmed me."

"My manner is not different, I think, brother," I replied. "Life has cast too deep a pall upon me, to suggest anything but thoughts of the dead and the lost."

"But it struck me that there was a fresh secret—a——"

"Tush!" I exclaimed, hastily; "It is hallucination. Good night."

"You will not stay?"

"There is no danger in my going, Gilbert," I answered; "why continue this pleading? If there were danger—if I were going to die—I should still go home, relying on my child being in safe hands. God bless him and you, and good-bye!"

I leaped into my carriage, and was borne away.

Looking from the window, I could still see

Gilbert standing on the spot where I had left him, with his gaze directed towards me—standing bareheaded and alone.

Could I but pray that in myself all sin, and shame, and misery were concentrated, and that his life might be eternal peace, and spared long to guard my child?

In his after life of tranquillity and happiness, chequered by but the lightest shadows of every-day occurrence—shadows that are here and gone—I can but believe that that prayer was heard, uttered as it was by sinful lips, and prompted by a withered heart like mine.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEETING AT 'THE REST.'

I STAND in Wharnby's green churchyard, with my father's grave at my feet and God's sky overhead. Looking from the first unto the last—from the rest of man to the dwelling place of angels—I repeat a vow made ere he who sleeps within had slumbered many days. My heart is troubled and the holy calmness of the young morning reproves me as I make it, but still my heated brain urges the confirmation of the act and it is sworn to be.

What a fair morning for so black a purpose! The rustling trees dyed here and there with the first autumn flush of decay, are full of birds whose harmony disturbs the stillness of the early day—the graves are moss grown,

and some are thick with flowers, and there is beauty even in this charnel place.

Old remembered scenes are round me. The winding road by the cliffs that leads to 'The Rest,' along which, years ago, I have so often come to this church I stand before, with my father—with Agnes, Gilbert, Edward—with Celia — with Redwin. The sea is still the same—it seems but yesterday I looked upon it on such a day as this with the sunlight tipping every gentle wave. Afar off, in the bold sweep of the coast—I can see the gleaming white cliffs, under whose rugged majesty I have so often strolled. Field on field to the right stretches away to the horizon, dotted here and there with clustering groves, or cottage roofs, or farm-house nestling in the valley. At a little distance is the rector's house, and the same white roses I have often plucked at, seem growing by the trellis work, and beneath the shady windows, and I can fancy that the hum of the bees around them comes to me in soft murmurings. The dark waving trees of the shrubbery, belonging to my father's home are in the distance, and tell me of the end I have in view and the

rocks are floating over them—specks in the distance.

Wharnby town—a mass of house-roof is piled together on my left, and Wharnby harbour, full of shipping, and a forest of masts, breaks the vista of the sea.

Close unto me rises the old grey stone tower from which those giant bells peal out on sabbath days, and grand in its old age, it looks with the blue heaven for its background.

There are ships with full spread sails far out upon the waters—there is life in the field of labour—there are men and women moving near the harbour, and yet the sun has hardly risen.

I have not slept throughout the night, and the first beam of the coming day has been welcomed a relief. I have stolen from my hotel, and am prepared. Beneath the cloak I wear, I clutch a case containing pistols, one of which will shortly be turned against my breast. My money, letters, are concealed about my person; and I wait in the church-yard—no fitter place for me to wait!—until the sun has risen higher from the east.

Vaudon is an early riser, and I shall meet

him before all Wharnby is astir, and this bright morning is the last either he or I will see.

I wait one hour in solitary communion with my thought, and then I move onwards to my destiny. A last look at the grave I shall never see again, but in which I may lie buried with my father, and then I pass through the swing-gate, and cross the chalky road, and move towards the winding path. I am not twenty paces down it, when I see the small figure of the rector coming from his house. I can but stand and watch as it emerges into the roadway, and hurries on a Christian mission to the sick or dying in some cottage home. I watch it out of sight, and move on once more.

As I near 'The Rest,' my heart bounds, and the blood mounts to my face—less of calm thought, and more of sinful wish—less of my hope in heaven, and more of my revenge on earth.

The lodge-windows are closed against the daylight, and no sign of waking life, save the noisy rooks cawing overhead, is near 'The Rest.'

'The Rest!'—my home!—the place where

he who gave me birth died in his loneliness!—where I have been content—where I have planned and loved—where the best days of my youth were spent—where all lessons learnt in manhood were first taught—where Vaudon and my brother Edward live, usurping Gilbert's birthright. The gates are locked, but there is a wicket that opens with a spring, let into the park-paling a few yards aside, and it turns back slowly on its creaking hinges, and I stand ankle-deep in the long grass, thick with dew.

I strike for the sequestered portions of the Park, intending to make my way to the back of the house and garden grounds, and the herds of deer fly before me wildly.

There are signs of neglect about the place—the green slopes are rankly luxuriant, and full of weeds—a sun-dial that I have often leant against and thought of Celia, is broken, and lies in many pieces—and a large vine, that crept along the garden-wall I am rapidly skirting, is trailing in the dust.

The side door is secured that admits me to the garden, but the lock is old and fragile, and one blow with a stone shatters it.

Into the garden, and advancing towards 'The Rest.'

As I near the house, I slacken my pace, and move more cautiously. The window of the old favourite parlour is unfastened, the blind is raised, and the folding glass-doors are open.

He is up—he is there! I feel assured one minute will see me face to face with him.

I try to subdue, in some degree, the agitation that attacks me—I stand and seek to keep down the cry of vengeance that rises to my lips, and for some minutes I shake as with an ague.

Partly composed, I glide along the terrace before the window—pass into the room, and stand before him, like one risen from the dead.

For a moment he sits in the leathern chair—my father's chair—transfixed and wondering. Every line upon my face is so deeply graven now—care has so altered me, and made an old man of me—that the first great surprise comes not immediately upon him.

As I advance, the truth flashes to him, and, clutching each arm of the chair, he rises, with

white face and glaring eyes, and the shadow of some fear passes for an instant over him.

Then, he is calm, and, with the hand upon his beard, stands silently regarding me, his tall form erect and still.

My tongue essays to break the bonds that hold it, but I make no sound, and he speaks first—

“I am glad to welcome you, Luke. Edward has not risen yet. He shall be summoned. I hope that you are well?”

He moves towards me with extended hand.

My tongue is free at last, and, recoiling from the proffered touch, I scream out—
“Back!”

Again the shadow of some fear darkens his face, and, halting abruptly, he fixes on me those glittering, snake-like eyes.

“‘Back,’” he repeats; “have you returned with hatred for me, Luke?”

“I have returned for vengeance, Jacques Vaudon,” I say sternly. “I have returned to cancel, by one stroke, the injuries you have heaped on us for years. You are unearthed!”

He takes a long breath, passes his hand across his face, and then is cold and placid,

and a well-known curl of the upper lip betrays the ready sneer. It may be a natural recovery to his old demeanour—it may be forced, to hide an inward dread of something he knows not of; but he says, with his accustomed voice, and its deep intonation unfaltering in the least—

“You have returned a madman! Sorrow and affliction have diseased your understanding, and you take your friends for foes.”

“I have taken foes for friends, years since,” I answer; “now, the masks have fallen to the ground. Vaudon, I have come with but one purpose; and that is, to fight you to the death. There is no avoiding it—there is no backward step—there is a bloody retribution coming.”

“Of what do you charge me, weak-minded friend,” sneers Vaudon. “You are ever ready with some slander. Let me hear the last.”

“No slander, but the truth revealed at last,” I cried.

“The truth, then.”

“Vaudon, I am not here to demand reparation for my own wrongs—for many cruel actions that have tended to blast the whole

current of my life—they are known and past ; but of deep villainy, such as devil only could have planned, and followed out, I stand in this room the accuser—I have come to revenge my father ! ”

“ Go on.”

“ To revenge my mother’s shame brought about by you. *My mother !* Do you hear ? ”

He presses his hand across his face more slowly than before, then buries it in the drooping beard again.

“ For what reason do you couple your mother’s disgrace with any action of my own ? ”

“ I have seen her ! ” I cry, maddened at his composure, which nothing seems to shake ; “ I have heard her own lips pronounce the name of the dastard who envied his friend’s happiness, and tore it from him with his lustful hands—I have witnessed the wreck of woman that she is, and that you have made her. If there be no accusations against you in these walls and beneath this roof, by the fireside, or at the grave in Wharnby’s churchyard—as there cannot be to such a man as you,—here am I with a more powerful means

to aid me. I am here at *his* command—he spoke it from his coffin!”

I draw the case of pistols from beneath my cloak, and fling it on the table beside which I stand.

Vandon begins to pace the room, his hands drop to his side, his calmness gradually forsakes him. Like a tiger caught in a snare, from which there is no escape, baffled at all points, he turns with a spring, at last.

“ Well, why deny it to you above all men ?” he cries, his broad chest heaving, and his hands clenched. “ If you have found the secret, I am not a coward to disown it. Nay, more, I glory in the success of all that I have planned. By the God you pray to, I am glad that my revenge has swept across you all with such utter devastation ! I have prosecuted it for a life-time—I swore it years ago, when your father first married the only woman that I loved. Patience, patience—hear me out !—Young as your mother was—but a child in other eyes,—I loved her with such passion as you, puling boy, have never known. Without one thing to love but her, there was no limit to my fondness. And she loved me till *he*

came, my college friend—the one I thought I might have trusted with my secret. What did he do—what did he do, but rob me of my prize, but win her from me, and take her to his home, and give her his own name! I swore, upon his wedding-day, to have a lasting revenge upon them *both*, that should never sleep, but follow them for ever, and wreak its hate even upon their children. I never forgot that vow. To them I was fair and open—I was their friend and confidant; but I had already begun to undermine. The time came. I won her love back after many years, and fled with her, and we fixed the shame upon another's head—that was a rare stratagem, that stood me in good stead. Well—I left her to the streets, and returned unsatiated and hungering for further prey. Mine was no English revenge—there was Italian spirit in it. I tracked you to this spot, and never quitted it until I had debased ye all. Was it not a glorious triumph, Luke Elmore, and did not your father reward me for it with his gold? What care I if it be known to all the world, now I have worked my schemes out? What should I fear from you, braggart, that I will shoot like a dog!"

"Your hours are numbered."

"Liar!" vociferated Vaudon—"it is your own doom that you have come to seek. If I have hated one of his children above all the rest, it has been you. Would that I had strangled you when we first met on the sands!"

"The time for words has gone—the hour for action has arrived—dare you follow me?"

I point towards the park.

"You require no seconds?" he asks.

"None."

"Your brother?"

"I would see him."

"And tell him all?"

"It matters not to *him*."

"I expect him every moment; if you are in no hurry, we will wait."

He is calm again, but every word is murmured through lips rigidly compressed.

It is not long before my brother breaks in upon our silent companionship, and cries out, "Luke!" with intense surprise.

"An unexpected visitor," I say, with a faint smile.

"Unexpected, indeed!" he answers—"but what has happened?"

He looks from me to Vaudon, and back again—and neither reply. At length I break the silence.

“What has transpired in this room, and on this morning, will, as I have said to *him*”—pointing to Vaudon—“affect you but little. Let it suffice you to know, we have met to settle an old quarrel, and that we thirst for one another’s life. If you will come with us, so good—if you will stay behind, I have one commission for you.”

“But what folly is it?” he asks of Vaudon.

“He has found out the author of your mother’s disgrace,” answers Vaudon, boldly—“and that author is myself.”

Edward starts, and his face flushes. A moment, and he is calm—and answers—“She is not worth fighting about. Come, come, men—shake hands with each other, and be friends. A quarrel, such as Luke threatens, would be unpleasant in the extreme.”

“If you could guess half the hate with which I regard that man,” I say, “you would spare me your common-place effort to bring about a reconciliation. Réconciliation!” I repeat—“brother, have you no more honour

in your heart, or shame within you, than to wish it?"

Edward, with more earnestness, turns to Vaudon.

"You will not accept this hot-headed challenge, Vaudon?—for my sake, give not way to such folly, or humour that of my brother's. What should *I* do if you were killed?"

This solicitude in Vaudon's safety fires me to delirium.

"Will you come with us, Edward?"

Vaudon moves towards the open window.

"You are really going?" cries my brother to him.

"Yes; and if time has not palsied my hand, or weakened my sight, the Lord have mercy on him!"

I snatch the case of pistols on the table, and we three pass out of the cold room into the sunlight.

Vaudon leads the way; he walks slowly towards the gate I had broken to effect an entrance, and his hand gripes at his beard, and his high forehead is crossed by a hundred lines, and he pays no heed to the remonstrances that Edward urges.

How I hate him ! I do not think of my own chances in the struggle now—I cannot but believe he will atone, so far as there is atonement unto man, for his long enmity to father, mother, sons, by a bloody death. I feel that he is going to his fate.

Into the deep recesses of the Park we wind our way, and Vaudon halts in a wild glade, and, looking at me fixedly, says—

“Will this be secluded enough, think you?”

“It will do,” I answer hollowly.

“Then it will do for me,” he says, shrugging his shoulders.

With one knee bent upon the grass, I seek to unlock the case I have brought with me.

“We are ill-matched, Luke Elmore,” says Vaudon, “but you will have it, and your death will lie lightly on my conscience. I am a veteran in the art, and you a novice, and must pay dearly for the lesson I have to teach. Make your arrangements with your brother!”

Edward stands moodily regarding us. Unlocking the case, and rising, I say.

“I have but one arrangement to make, I have a letter to place in your hands Edward.

If I fall, you will send it to my brother Gilbert?"

"Yes," he answers surlily.

"If I should be destined for the avenger, still send it, or keep it for a time. It may be a proof required to exculpate you from any share in what may happen here this day."

Meanwhile, Vaudon has stooped and taken up the silver-mounted pistols in the case.

"A handsome pair," he mutters sneeringly, "and new ones for the occasion. That is unwise."

A moment's pause.

"Are these loaded?"

"Yes."

"Who loaded them?"

"I had them loaded by the maker."

"I will take your word. Quick!" he cries impatiently, "we tarry here too long."

"Will you choose?"

He carefully examines them, and then passes one across to me.

Edward's cheek turns pale, and he murmurs a few last words of intercession,—but with pain I note that they are all for Vaudon.

"Will you call, Edward?" asks Vaudon, weighing the pistol in his hand.

"Not I—not I."

"Then the task devolves on me," he says, "Mr. Elmore, if you will stand where that sun-track marks the grass—a fair distance I conjecture—and fire at the word 'three,' you will oblige me."

There is an affectation in his calmness now, for I can see his teeth almost biting through his lip. My want of fear, my fixed determination startles him, for the first time.

I stride to the spot indicated, and he faces me at some distance, with the silver-mounted pistol in his hand. Edward with suspended breath, stands watching.

"Are you prepared?" he asks.

"I am."

My cloak has fallen to the ground, and I stand erect before him, without a quickening pulse or faltering hand.

"*One!*"

We raise our pistols—the sunlight gleams upon the polished barrel, but I see his heart behind it.

"*Two!*"

One look at my brother. If I fall I shall have seen him once again. The word 'Three'

remains unpronounced—he hesitates and stands before me struggling with his speech. Does the shadow fall upon him now!

With his disengaged hand he sweeps back his hair from his brow, and making one step forward, shouts—“*Three!*”

There is but one report, and loud and clear it rings from the pistol in my hand—there is but one man lying with a look of death upon his face, and that is Jacques Vaudon, the seducer of my mother.

Dropping the pistol in the long grass, I cross towards the prostrate form, convulsed with horror and alarm. Edward is hanging over him, but Vaudon resists his efforts to take his hand, or let a touch fall on him, and cries, as I advance,—

“What juggling is this?”

“I know not. It is an awful mystery.”

I stoop and take up the pistol beside Vaudon. It is unloaded!

“Good God! this is murder,” I exclaim.

“Treachery—treachery!” gasps Vaudon, with his hand to his breast.

“I knew it not—I sought not such revenge as this—I offered my own life for yours.”

He replies not, but the bloody hand at his breast, drops powerless, and he murmurs—
“you did not slay me with such intent—well, I must believe it—I will believe it. There has been some mistake. Were—were ——”

After a pause for breath, he goes on—
“Were the pistols examined by you?”

“I told the man to load them—I was satisfied—I did not think, or care to test them.”

“Fool—blind fool that I have been!”

He lies upon the grass, red with his life's blood, and pants like a dog.—After a pause,—

“If there be—if there be—a God,” he says, his heavy lids closing over his glazed eyes,—“there was his Hand in this. But I do not—do not—think—that—if—”

He pauses—we stoop over him—he is dead.

Edward kneels beside him, and shrieks his name, and wrings his hands in lamentation. I touch my brother and he screams—“Away, you have killed my only friend—my father—my sole comforter. Go on your course, murderer!”

I go. Stealing through the Park, crouching by the garden wall, conscious that I have slain one of God's creatures, who stood helplessly

before me—conscious of how poor a gratification is revenge, no matter the just cause of the avenger, I feel that curse of blood upon me that no prayer can avert—that no repentance can erase the stain.

* * * *

The Figure never leaves me, although we are on the darkened plain shadowed by the mountain, and there is no need of guidance more. The sun is set—the night is here, and yet the Phantom waits; I cannot elude it—it is ever with me. Threatening, or imploring, it still abideth, and there is no Rest for me. The mountains, by which I am environed, have no charms in their rugged beauty, and I can but shun the hardy villagers who salute me as I cross their path.

In the bright morning comes the echoing horn, and I start to despair and, another day; and the eagle soars with flapping wings into the blue depths of the sky.

But the eagle has its young in the nest on the cliff, and my thoughts cannot soar to the heaven!

THE END.

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